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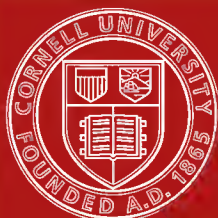
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Bohemian days in Fleet Street /



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BOHEMIAN DAYS IN FLEET STREET

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BY
A JOURNALIST



LONDON
JOHN LONG, LIMITED
NORRIS STREET, HAYMARKET
MCMXIII
E. F.

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First published in 1913

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE STREET OF ADVENTURE - - - -	9
II. DRIFTING INTO IT - - - -	18
III. LEARNING TO SWIM - - - -	33
IV. INTO THE MAELSTROM - - - -	49
V. SOCIETY JOURNALISM - - - -	68
VI. A GAY SCIENCE - - - -	84
VII. THE PASSING OF THE PURITAN SABBATH - -	104
VIII. ODD FISH - - - -	116
IX. MORE ODD FISH - - - -	130
X. BOHEMIAN CLUBS - - - -	146
XI. THE JOKER - - - -	164
XII. ANSDELL'S AFTERNOONS - - - -	181
XIII. DE MORTUIS - - - -	192
XIV. MY FRIENDS THE PLAYERS - - - -	205
XV. "THE 'ALLS" - - - -	222
XVI. MINE EASE AT MINE INN - - - -	240
XVII. BOOKIES AND OTHER WILD-FOWL - - - -	260
XVIII. OLLA PODRIDA - - - -	276
XIX. THE PRESS IN TRANSITION - - - -	292
INDEX - - - -	301

BOHEMIAN DAYS IN FLEET STREET

CHAPTER I

THE STREET OF ADVENTURE

BOOKS beget books, even when they are books of autobiography. Not that the writer of reminiscence will admit as much. He is—if you believe him—the victim of an irrepressible impulse, or he has at length (usually at great length) yielded to the solicitations of a large circle of acquaintances. I am impelled to my present enterprise by no sense of my own aptitude, nor have my discerning friends urged that some record of my experiences would supply a long-felt want. My book—like a great many other books—owes its existence to a book that went before it. In other and plainer words, if Mr. Philip Gibbs had not written his novel entitled “The Street of Adventure,” this present collection of reminiscences would never have been attempted. And I should, perhaps, apologize to Mr. Gibbs for saddling him with the awful responsibility. The novel to which allusion has been made—and a very excellent one it is—suddenly, but with much distinctness, suggested my course. The muck-rake of reminiscence is deliberately taken up because I represent a condition of Press life that has apparently ceased to exist. If one accepts the statements of Mr. Gibbs—and there is every reason why one should—the Fleet Street of to-day bears no sort of resemblance to the Fleet Street of yesterday. If I describe the London Press and the London Pressman of less than

two decades ago, I am describing a state of things that has been reformed off the face of the earth, and a race of men extinct as the Dodo.

To an old member of the Press this is the real significance of "The Street of Adventure," for the story describes—with entire candour and accuracy; one can entertain no doubt about that—the working of the Metropolitan Press and its personnel as they exist at this the dawn of the century. I have read chapter after chapter of the story with a growing sentiment of astonishment and dismay. The accomplished author describes, at first hand, a conjuncture of men and conditions so different to that existing in my time that I completely fail to recognize in this picture of the present a single salient characteristic of the past. Had the writer discovered for us evidences of a natural progress of evolution, a survival of fitness, an institution rising on stepping-stones of its dead self to higher things, this book had never been conceived. But this melancholy tale suggests a sad and sudden deterioration, the inauguration of a period of decadence, the setting in of a newspaper rot. 't is in the belief that a certain interest must centre about times that have gone beyond recall, and round the names of the men whose successors are ruthlessly painted for us in the pages before me, that I address myself to the task of fixing the random recollection of some twenty jocund years.

During the seventies and eighties I knew my Fleet Street well. I worked among its presses; was on intimate terms with many of its most famous habitués; revelled in its atmosphere; and, in a word, lived its strenuous but happy life. And I would wish no better now—could such things be—than to live it all over again: granted, of course, that I lived it under the same conditions and among the same companions. Under the conditions and among the companions described in "The Street of Adventure," a survivor of the seventies or eighties would find life intolerable. For the conditions, as described, are degrading, and the companionship unwholesome and depressing. It is impossible to catch the new atmosphere, to visualize the new journalist. And any nascent desire I may once have

cherished to visit the scenes of my ancient labours has been effectually quenched by the perusal of these squalid records.

The time occupied in the unfolding of the drama which marks our author's starting-point commences with the founding of an important daily paper, and ends with the foundering of the same. The *dramatis personæ* belong entirely to the staff of the wonderful party organ, with the proprietor, shadowy but maleficent, brooding over the adventure like a gloomy and heartily detested Fate. In making the acquaintance of the members of the staff I am being introduced to a new race. I recognize nothing in character, equipment, or even in physique, that for a moment recalls the figures of the past. For "there were giants on the earth in those days." The characters represented here are anæmic, neurotic, hysterical. Their professional avocation brings them into competition with women, and the conditions of their service involves working with them as colleagues and accepting them as comrades. This intimate professional association may account for the hysterics—to some extent. But it does not account for the infinite joylessness which is the dominant note of the record. The various characters seem to move in a fuliginous cloud beyond which they are always scenting disaster. Should the disaster ensue, they are as men and women without hope. When, in effect, the dreaded calamity does overtake them—not without due notice—they are like mountain sheep in a thunder-storm: awe-stricken and helpless. We of a brisker time might, under similar circumstances, have imitated sheep in that we would have had recourse to our "damns." But the gentlemen of "The Street of Adventure" have not spirit enough even for that. To change the figure: Their ship has foundered; they abandon themselves to their fate, for not one of them can swim.

Now, in the times of which I am about to record a few personal impressions, total disaster of the kind described here was impossible. That is to say, collapse of a newspaper did not involve the endowment of the individual members of its staff with the key of the street. For although the

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failure of a journal—and I have watched over the last hours of more than one or two of them—might mean a temporary crippling and a serious curtailment of income to certain members of the staff, it never involved a drought in all the springs of income. For even the most important writers on the staff of a daily newspaper had other irons in the fire. Indeed, the more important the writer, the greater the number of fires offered for the accommodation of his irons. But the adventurers in this new Fleet Street are represented as being bound body and soul to a single proprietor. They are in thrall to one insistent master. In the morning they are expected to report themselves at the office, and are then to take their places in a sort of common-room waiting for orders, much as messenger-boys at their call-centres lounge around waiting for their "turn."

The atmosphere, as I endeavour to catch it from these illuminating pages, is that of a barracks—barracks provided for an army where women serve in the ranks. One by one the anxious, nervous waiters are sent on their several missions. Their tasks are not of a very cheerful or inspiring kind. Crime-hunting, according to Mr. Gibbs, appears to be a tremendous "feature" in the journals of the period, and the crime-hunter, as observed by him, is the most virile (perhaps I had rather say the least effeminate) of these queer adventurers. He, at all events, "lives up" to his mission, and even provides his home with an object-lesson in the social strata through which he works in search of his quarry, for he has taken under his "protection" a member of the criminal classes, and established her as mistress of his flat in Battersea. Pretty well this for one of the most distinguished members of the staff of a leading Metropolitan journal! and quaint reading for those who belong to other times, and illustrated—I am happy to think—other manners. If, however, the ladies and gentlemen of the newspaper staff of the period are depicted as eccentric in both conduct and appearance, their conversation when they forgather in their gaollike common-room, or in their favourite taverns, is neither bright nor edifying. They interchange some cheap philosophical reflections, and occasionally employ a preciosity

of diction which, introduced in the eighties, was laughed out of Fleet Street by the men of that bustling time. Beyond these exchanges of conversational mock-jewellery, their talk is all of "shop." And deadly dull it is. The poor creatures never deviate into fun. Their young lives are coloured by a sense of apprehension and oppression. To them the newspaper is an awful mother. Yet her death means the sealing-up of the founts by which they live. And all their thoughts are grey and melancholy in anticipation of the imminent catastrophe. When eventually the long-anticipated doom is announced, the sensation of the reader is that of relief. The chapter in which the disaster is set forth is, as a piece of writing, so forcible and so convincing that one is driven to the conclusion that the writer is describing an actual occurrence. And the victims? Does their conduct under the final stroke evoke our sympathy as their apologist evidently means that it should? Personally I am conscious of no sentiments other than those of pity and contempt. When the proprietor makes the announcement that he has gone the limit, and that no further issue of his costly and ill-fated paper will be made, some of the men are described as weeping; all are more or less hysterical. The busy builders of an overturned ant-heap arouse our admiration by their courage and capacity and resource. The pitiable creatures who crawl out into the night from the crumbling press-heap of Fleet Street can but provoke a gibe. Some of them seek the oblivion purchasable in public-houses—for the journalist in "The Street of Adventure" understands a tavern only as a place in which to get drunk—others seek consolation in the flats of the lady members of the staff, an expedient more sober at once and more economical. I quit their society with pleasure. They belong to a marrowless, joyless, invertebrate breed; seedy, selfish, but superior persons, affording at all times a safe medium for maleficent mind-microbes on the prowl after a reliable culture.

If "The Street of Adventure" supplies a cinematographic record of the London journalistic life of to-day, it should be well worth while, I think, to compose some account of the

very different conditions prevailing on the Press less than two decades ago ; to present some fairly recognizable sketches of the gentlemen of the Press who bore the burden and heat of that day ; to indicate the manner in which our cheery duties were discharged ; and—a more difficult matter—to render, if possible, something of the atmosphere of the period. My own experience, roughly speaking, covers a period of twenty years. It extends from 1870 to 1890. The mere record of a few of the names of those with whom at one time or another I became associated indicates at once the great gulf fixed between the Then and the Now. There were, among others, George Augustus Sala, Godfrey Turner, “ Scholar ” Williams, Edmund Yates, Gilbert Venables, Tom Purnell, Archibald Forbes, Captain Hamber, George Henty, John Augustus O’Shea, Edmund O’Donovan, Hilary Skinner, Charles Williams, Henry Pearse, John Lovell. In the mere matter of physique this short catalogue suggests another age of journalists. Imagine these men, or any one of them, being thrown into hysterics by the failure of a newspaper to pay its way. Fancy Forbes in tears over the *Daily News* reduced to a halfpenny ! Or Edmund O’Donovan, on the morrow of his proprietor’s financial ruin, seeking balm for his wounded spirit in the flats of lady colleagues !

By the nature of his calling the journalist is thrown much into contact with those outside his profession. The descriptive writer and special correspondent touches life at all points. A memorable struggle in the Commons House ; the more lurid impact of armies ; coronations ; first nights at the theatre ; command nights at the opera ; the funerals of statesmen ; prize-fights—the thousand pageants that make up the passing show called “ public life ”—these were approached by the Press correspondents, not in the spirit of nervous despondency described as characterizing the attitude of the puppets of Mr. Gibbs. My contemporaries went to work in an optimistic mood, mixed with the pageant with an air of cheery familiarity, and recorded their impressions in articles which would be considered nowadays as too picturesque, too vigorous, and too literary in style. Their

functions brought them into pleasant contact with the heroes of whom they sung. They were given to looking at things from the inside as well as from the outside. They made friendships among the Parliament men, the pugilists, the pulpiteers, and the players, of whose exploits they were the chartered chroniclers. If an acquired familiarity with social functions of every sort could constitute a Society man, then the journalist of my period should—after a long and exhausting experience—possess all the gifts and graces of that ineffable being. And at the least his retrospect should be of the most pleasant description. He will recall with delight his experience of the dandies and the dullards, the wits and the wantons, with whom he came in contact during his excursions in those higher altitudes. Actors and actresses were, of course, his ordinary prey. Among the stars of the dramatic firmament he revolved in an amity now and then disturbed by some notice less fulsome than the object of it may have deemed acceptable. But on the whole the terms existing in my time between Press and Stage were those of immense consideration each for each. That the love of each for each has grown more ardent in these later days may be attributable to the prodigious increase in the advertising orders received by newspaper managers from the managers of playhouses. Painters were less amenable. Them you had to meet socially. They had the least possible respect for the professional journalist's opinion of pictures. They affected to ignore newspaper criticism of their exhibited works, or, if they were thrust upon them, shuddered as they read. Artists in black-and-white found their way to Fleet Street, but their dealings were confined to the illustrated papers. The first time that a drawing appeared in a daily paper was, if I remember rightly, when the *Daily Telegraph* published what it called "a portrait sketch" of Lefroy the murderer, a publication which led, it may be remembered, to the arrest of that miscreant. To-day the black-and-white artist is in the ascendant, and I entertain a pious hope that the day is not far off when its critics will habitually say of a newspaper, not that it is well or ill "written," but that it is well or ill "drawn."

This book will be largely anecdotal. I may therefore be permitted at this point—irrelevantly and parenthetically—to introduce a reminiscence of Oscar Wilde which the mention of Lefroy recalls to me ; I might forget it later. I was sitting at Romano's in the company of that clever and ill-fated genius shortly after the trial of Lefroy. Wilde was amusing the company with his affectations and paradoxes. "If," he said, in his ineffably superior way—"if I were not a poet, and could not be an artist, I should wish to be a murderer." "What!" exclaimed one of us, "and have your portrait-sketch in the *Daily Telegraph*?" "Better that," cooed Wilde, "than to go down to the sunless grave unknown." On the same occasion the merits of Irving—then attracting the town—came up for discussion. Wilde was a warm supporter of the actor's methods, and indulged in a strain of exaggerated praise over the performance then holding the boards at the Lyceum. "But what about his legs?" inquired an irreverent listener. "Irving's legs," answered Wilde, with the manner of a man who is promulgating some eternal truth—"Irving's legs are distinctly precious, *but his left leg is a poem!*"

Having permitted myself this moment of "comic relief," I proceed to state the plan which I propose to follow in the following pages. I disclaim any title to the office of autobiographer. I am nobody. My own twenty years' experience is nothing. The interest of my reminiscences centres entirely in those others among whom my lot was cast. So, having in the three following chapters described the stages over which I drifted into journalism, I shall in the succeeding chapters abandon any chronological arrangement of narrative, and group in each section certain events, individuals, enterprises, and incidents. And the interest I hope to enhance by the introduction of incidents and anecdotes that have come under my personal observation and been uttered in my own hearing.

As I essay to challenge my memory of that pleasant past, the first results are not satisfactory. The pictures are confused in composition and blurred in general effect. After a little patient waiting—much in the manner of our late friend

Stead in Julia's bureau—the blurred pictures acquire other characteristics. The second effect is kaleidoscopic. The retrospect is full of movement and colour. At last the kaleidoscopic effects become mere atmosphere, and one by one, or in groups, the *dramatis personæ* take their places on the stage. And the curtain rises on the play.

CHAPTER II

DRIFTING INTO IT

NOWADAYS, I understand, there are schools to educate young gentlemen for the Press. Indeed, in my own time a school of journalism was founded by a man who had taken to the calling quite late in life. But I have never heard that the seminary in question turned out any pressman of eminence or even of uncommon aptitude. The founder of the singular academy was a Mr. David Anderson, about whom and about whose school I may have something to say in another chapter.

A man of very different calibre, a profound literary scholar, the most cultured critic of his time, was, at a more recent period, imbued with Anderson's idea that a special training was desirable in the case of candidates for a vacancy on a newspaper staff. He was, indeed, prepared to carry the notion much farther than the system of perfunctory instruction instituted by the founder of the "school," who was more or less a blind leader of the blind. The second reformer to whom I allude contemplated the establishment of a Chair of Journalism at the University of Birmingham. Indeed, he had obtained considerable support for his enterprise, and had it not been for his lamented death, I believe, the scheme would have taken shape. I had several opportunities of discussing the proposal with Professor Churton Collins—for it is of that accomplished critic and enthusiastic educationist I am speaking—and, although it was difficult to withstand arguments conveyed in the Professor's felicitous language, and uttered in his melodious and persuasive tones, I was never quite convinced of the

utility of the scheme. From whence are the Professors to be drawn? Not from the ranks of journalism, surely. Because the men who have risen to such an eminence in journalism as would qualify them for the position would be very unlikely to abandon their fat editorships for the poor emoluments of such a Chair.

Churton Collins was a man with a passion for accuracy. His whole teaching was a protest against the slipshod style in literature. His favourite epithet was "charlatan," which he hurled against all incompetent persons professing to instruct the public. Moreover, though in the earlier stages of his career he wrote for newspapers, he was never what was known as "a newspaper man." He was *on* the Press, but not *of* it. And I question if he had taken much notice of its later developments. Had he observed the signs of the times as they are seen in our daily broadsheets, he would have perhaps admitted that among the qualifications which should be demanded in any occupant of a University Chair of Journalism was a good working knowledge of the camera, and the ability to instruct students in the most suitable subjects for photographic reproduction.

Schools of journalism and professorships of Press lore are "all my eye and Betty Martin." The journalist, like the poet, is born, not made. A University education can do him no harm. A large proportion of the men of the seventies and eighties had had a distinguished University career. Nor does the absence of a college education prejudice the aspiring neophyte. Those men, indeed, who have made themselves a name in journalism—such men, for instance, as George Sala and Archibald Forbes—started without any of the equipment supplied by an Alma Mater. Any training worth mentioning must be picked up on the Press itself. And the main qualification is a natural aptitude. Thus, the journalist—self-taught man, or public-school man, or University man—just drifts into it.

Personally I have to admit that it was in my own case entirely a matter of drifting. Unconsciously and gently impelled toward it by the motions of a certain desire for facile and frequent expression in print, one becomes eventu-

ally the subject of an invincible attraction. Those who were responsible for the ordering of my early life took a large view of their responsibilities. The same persons who had provided me with a rattle and a cradle, in later years selected for me a profession. And although I have never ceased to be a member of the learned profession chosen for me, in the same way that I abandoned the rattle and the perambulator, it has never afforded me either the amusement or the support supplied by the toys or the equipages of childhood. I am indebted to it, however, for some cherished friendships, and for introductions to some valuable "openings" into that teeming journalistic arena with which I was to become identified. Those set in authority over me believed that I was "cut out" for a barrister. But when I, my friends, was called to the Bar, I'd an appetite—well, for anything but law. The law never appealed to me. Literature always did. Before I went into chambers—and for some time after that—the only interest the Temple possessed for me was that Goldsmith lay buried there, and that there Warrington and Pendennis railed against the publishers, and wrote for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, thus antedating by many years the actual appearance of that journal. While reading for the Bar and keeping my terms, I had few acquaintances in London beyond those I met at the dinners in Hall, and Mr. MacDermott, with whom I "read." The town seemed deadly lonely at first. It takes some time before the new-comer realizes that he is part of the crowd that jostles him, before the feeling of isolation gives way to that of fellowship.

When I first came up, I lodged at the house of an old gentleman in Woburn Place, Russell Square. He was a typical Londoner, and he followed a calling of which, I should imagine, he must have been the very last professor. He was a painter of hatchments. In those days the death of a member of the aristocracy was indicated by the appearance on the house-front of a canvas bearing a representation of the armorial bearings of the deceased. This work of art was usually fixed between the windows of the first-floor. These grim heraldic emblazonments were at one time

exhibited in considerable profusion in the streets and squares of the West End. The custom seems to have "gone out." So many swells now live in flats, where the exhibition of such mural decoration might be misunderstood and resented, that the grisly custom has grown into desuetude. My landlord was the last of the hatchment painters. He was a little man close upon seventy years of age. He was extremely good-looking, had small side-whiskers and a tiny imperial, both snow-white. The rest of his face was clean-shaven. His salient physical peculiarity was a pink and white complexion which have been the despair and envy of his aristocratic patrons. He was a brisk, cheery mortal wonderfully quick in his movements. For the rest, he loved the London in which he had been born, and from which he had never wandered much farther than Hampton Court ; he had a fund of information about the houses of Mayfair and Bloomsbury ; he was a determined playgoer ; he had an acquaintanceship with some actors and actresses, and was on particularly friendly terms with Charles Mathews. Naturally, he was a wellspring of gossip regarding the noble families with whom his melancholy art made him acquainted.

His studio was in Great Ormond Street, and next door to the Working Men's College, where he had got to know the Rev. F. D. Maurice and the Rev. Charles Kingsley. Of the latter broad-minded Broad Churchman he had several stories. One only can I recall. Kingsley had felt called upon to reprove a parishioner of his on a growing spirit of miserliness which he was exhibiting. The fellow was well off, a widower, and living alone. He was denying himself the necessaries of life, when his Rector thought it time to remonstrate. But the old man was immune against reason, or, rather, he had an objection to every argument urged by his spiritual adviser. At last Kingsley took him on lower ground. The old fellow had an only son. He was a sailor and a notoriously free-handed young man. "This money," urged the Rector, "which you are hoarding, and which you might employ so usefully, will come at last to your boy, who will fling it

about with both hands." "Ah, well," observed the unrepentant niggard, "if Jim has on'y half the pleasure a-spendin' on it as I've had a-savin' on it, I wholly envy 'im—that 'a do." A congregation composed of rustics of that type must have been a bit of a trial to a man of Kingsley's optimistic temperament. But, then, his reverence was also endowed with the saving grace of humour.

I suppose the hatchment habit—which had persisted for so many generations—had fallen into a rapid decline just about this period, for my cheery little landlord had but lately taken to letting apartments. The income from heraldic painting had ceased to prove sufficient for the upkeep of a big house. The old gentleman's housekeepers were a wife and daughter, whose second-hand acquaintance with the heraldry of the great had induced the belief that, if not actually "in Society," they were very much in touch with it. Their conversation was studded with allusions to "Lady This" and "Lord That." It was some time before I discovered that their constant conversational appeals to "the Dook," a personage with whom, it might appear, they lived on terms of considerable intimacy, was His Grace the Duke of Bedford. Their supposed friendship with that nobleman rested solely on the circumstance that His Grace was the ground landlord of the premises in which they lived. "I shall certainly speak to the Dook about it," or, "You must reelly write to His Grace, my dear," were tit-bits that were served up to me *ad nauseam* when—as would sometimes be the case—I was asked to join the ladies at five o'clock tea. In his reminiscences of "the nobs," as the Upper Ten were then called, the hatchment painter himself betrayed no snobbishness whatever. He related anecdotes of his noble employers, just as he would tell a "good thing" about a divine, or an actor, or an artist.

And talking of artists, I may mention here that the only person of distinction whose acquaintance I ever made through my host was Frost, the accomplished follower of Etty as a painter of the nude. I had the mild, man-in-the-street sort of admiration of Frost's work, which I had seen on the walls of the Royal Academy Exhibition,

then held, not at Burlington House, but in Trafalgar Square. And from his pictures I expected—such are the perverse preconceptions of youth—to meet a young, tall, flamboyant man with flowing locks and the airs of a Grand Seigneur. We were walking one morning—my host and I—down the main avenue of the Regent's Park. It was spring-time. The flower-beds were ablaze with bulb plants. But few people were about at the moment. Presently we came upon a small and sombre man feeding the sparrows, which followed him in flocks, hovering about his head, and now and then lighting on his hand to snatch a crumb. The small, sombre man was dressed in rusty broadcloth. He wore a wig, had a most melancholy expression, and might have been put down as a superannuated tax-collector, a solicitor run to seed, a Dissenting preacher out of work ; but not one man in a thousand would have identified him as a painter of nude subjects, which had been severely reprobated by the unco' guid. Yet the amiable provider of food for the sparrows was none other than the celebrated Mr. Frost. Frost was a bachelor, and his house was kept for him by a couple of old maiden sisters, who had little sympathy with the direction in art which their brother's genius had taken. But the sparrows in Regent's Park altogether approved of their eccentric benefactor. And in this particular form of charity he was the forerunner of the amiable M. Pol (that is the Frenchman's name, I think) whom I have watched feeding the birds in the gardens of the Tuileries. On this occasion Frost was not to be tempted into any discussion on art. He was intent on arguing the question of drains with my friend, and spoke on the sewer question with the dry particularity of a sanitary engineer. Altogether a disappointing experience of the painter of "*Actea : the Nymph of the Shore*," a work which had stimulated all my youthful enthusiasm.

The first movement in the drifting stage of my career was the result of my presence at the first performance of "*School*" at the old Prince of Wales Theatre in Tottenham Street. The hatchment painter and I had long before agreed that we would be present on that memorable occasion.

The night came at last. We were early—or what in those days would have been considered early—and obtained seats at the back of the pit. At that time the suburbs still remained sane. There was no queue of demented women posted outside pit and gallery doors at eight o'clock in the morning so as to be in good time for a performance commencing at eight at night. But the seating capacity of Miss Wilton's theatre was limited, the pittites being restricted to a very small area, and, having passed the check-taker, we felt that we might consider ourselves lucky in having gained admittance at all. Ah, to recall the sensations of that playgoing! The sigh of relief as I settle myself in my seat! The roseate air of pleasurable anticipation on the faces of those about me; the empty rows of the booked stalls stretching from the front row of the pit to the orchestra; the eager scanning of the features of the stalls as they file in; the curious feeling of cheery elation, of high expectation—these are sensations which grow very stale with use; they are the prerogatives of youth. Enjoy them, my boys, while you are in your heyday. They are moods for which the old and the *blasé* would give a ransom to experience once again.

Indirectly and ultimately this visit to the pit meant much to me. Immediately it meant my first appearance in print in a London publication; eventually it meant my first acquaintance with a dramatic author. Ultimately, perhaps, it meant the determination to a calling quite apart from that to which I had been devoted by my friends. My chirpy companion, as he kept pointing out to me the various distinguished stall-holders as they filed into their places, little dreamed—as, indeed, how should he?—that he was conversing with a dramatic critic *in embryo*, and that in the course of a few short years I, too, would have a stall set apart for me in that select parterre.

With the production of "School" the Bancroft management and the Robertson comedies reached high-water mark, and all the town was soon rushing to the Royal Dustbin in its grimy and shabby little street off the Tottenham Court Road. A return to the natural in comedy has always

spelled success. Farquhar's was such a return. Goldsmith's return to nature was hailed by a community sick of stilted heroics and artificial sentiment. Sheridan later on recalled the playgoer to the fact that to give a humorous presentation of society as it is means the highest pleasure to the patron and the highest profit to the playwright. At this present time of writing a return to nature has a meaning very different indeed to that which it bore at other periods. Nowadays the meaning of a return to nature seems to be a return to obscenity. Natural is a term connoting lubricity. And to this confusion in the minds of some modern dramatists as to the true significance of words I attribute much of the irritation caused by supervision and most of the agitation fomented with a view of disestablishing the censorship. But in the old Tottenham Street days we had not as yet accepted the quaint perversion of ideas at present offered us by an anæmic, exotic, futile section of playwrights, whose goods are exhibited at unlicensed matinées, because—luckily—the managers see “no money” in them. The word “nature” was not understood in this foul fashion by T. W. Robertson. The men and women of Robertson's comedies were the men and women of his own day. The incidents were amusing without being preposterous, or pathetic without being maudlin. The construction of the Robertson series was close, intelligible, sequent. His dialogue rippled rather than sparkled; the story was invariably simple, wholesome, attractive; and over each production was the incommunicable Robertson atmosphere.

And the management that presented these dainty works exercised a care, a taste, and a scrupulous devotion to the details of representation which came as a revelation to those acquainted with the stage methods of the period; and marked, indeed, a revolution in stage management. It is not overstating the case to say that, had it not been for the lead given in this direction by the Bancrofts in the 'sixties and early 'seventies, and subsequently followed up with still greater *éclat* by the same artists at the Haymarket, one would scarcely have witnessed the elaborate sets and costly casts to which Irving accustomed us in the 'eighties and

'nineties, or on which, in our own time, Sir Herbert Tree spends so much money and so much intelligent enterprise. In the history of stage reform, however, the Bancrofts must always figure as pioneers ; nor is anyone who is old enough to remember the London stage as it was accepted before their management of the Prince of Wales Theatre, at all likely to controvert the statement. Happily for the public, the lead was quickly and largely followed. The old-fashioned stage-manager became a thing of the past. What was once the exception is now the rule.

“ Most can raise the flowers now,
For all have got the seed.”

Slender as was my experience of London theatres and immature as was my judgment, I was intelligently impressed by the idyllic delicacy of the work represented, and by the exquisite rendering accorded by a company so wonderfully fitted with their parts. I confess to having felt an enthusiasm then which now I should have some difficulty in explaining. That emotion was soon to find an opportunity for expression. When “ School ” had been running for some little time, a letter appeared in the *Times*, conceived in that spirit of dignified rebuke which, in its correspondents, seems to have appealed to successive editors of that great newspaper. In this communication Robertson was crudely accused of having stolen the play, lock, stock, and barrel, from a play then (or recently) running in Germany. I had no acquaintance with the German language and no time (so insistent on protest was my indignation) to inquire into the facts. But I felt that from the internal evidence afforded by “ School ” I would be able to make a good case. Even in those remote days many of our most admired articles of so-called British manufacture were “ made in Germany,” and most of them bore about with them the ineffaceable signs of their origin. I strongly felt that on internal evidence I should have little difficulty, in that “ School ” was “ quite English, you know,” and that, above all, there was no trace whatever of anything German in the conception or the treatment. I had already seen the play a second

time when the *Times* letter made its appearance. On the night of the day on which it was published I paid a third visit to the pit of the Tottenham Street playhouse. When I got back to my "diggings," I sat down and commenced to write what I intended to be a letter to Jupiter Tonans of Printing House Square, but what turned out to be my first professional contribution to the London Press. Next day I abandoned my more legitimate studies, and rewrote and polished—as well as I knew how—the essay over which I had burned my first sacrifice of midnight oil. The result was in no way suitable as a letter in the correspondence column of a newspaper. My own poor outlook assured me of that. Where to send the essay? A copy of a weekly magazine called *Once a Week* lay on a chair in the room. I caught it up, looked for the editorial address, wrote a brief note to the editor apprising him of the drift of my contribution, addressed an envelope, and posted my "stuff," as I subsequently learned to call my articles in manuscript.

Had a mentor, skilled to advise, been available at that moment, he would no doubt have advised me to send my essay to any other publication, but *not* to *Once a Week*, because the paper in question was then under the editorial control of a member of the staff of the *Times*. So that—a circumstance of which I was happily ignorant—the organ selected haphazard for my venture was the very last that should be likely to serve my purpose. Four days after its despatch I received a proof of the article with a request that it should be "returned immediately" to the printer. A delightful sensation—that of correcting one's first galleys of matter moist from the press! The following week the article appeared in all the pride of print, though I confess that the pride of print (a mere figurative locution) was as nothing to the pride of the author who already saw himself on the high-road to fame and fortune. Alas! it is a high-road which, while the gayest and cheeriest to travel, rarely leads to fame, and never to fortune. . . . I have no doubt that this first published composition of mine was a tremendously faulty piece of work—immature and pretentious. But the appearance of no subsequent production of mine

has afforded me a tithe of the pleasure. And, incidentally, it was the means of my making the acquaintance of "Tom" Robertson.

Our acquaintanceship—never an intimate one—began with a correspondence, friendly and genial on his side, ebullient and unctuous, I fear, on mine, for I was very young. Some time elapsed before I met him in the flesh. The introduction was effected at the Albion Tavern in Russell Street, Covent Garden. That famous hostelry has gone by the board this many a day. When first I knew it the Albion was a London institution for which one might have prophesied a permanence as secure as that of St. Paul's. It faced the north side wall of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, some distance west of the stage-door. It was the favourite supper resort of theatrical people, and famous for its tripe and onions and for its marrow-bones. An excellent dinner of fish, joint, and cheese was served earlier in the evening at half a crown a head—the carver, in white smock and apron and white cook's cap, wheeling the joint round from table to table on an ambulatory dumb-waiter, and carving in front of the customer, and according to the customer's desire. The place was run by two brothers, named Cooper, who owned a similar house in Fleet Street. This was called the Rainbow. It was a great luncheon-resort of lawyers, and three-fourths of the present occupants of the judicial bench must have taken their midday meal there from time to time. The Rainbow, alas! where once law officers chopped and learned leaders absorbed the mid-day refresher, is now mainly a wine-bar—the daily resort of the Guppys, the Joblings, and the Smallweeds of the profession.

The brothers Cooper were not very much in evidence at either house. They presented none of the characteristics of the typical licensed victualler. Indeed, they were the most highly respectable looking men to be seen in any walk of life—rosy-cheeked, white-whiskered, of solemnly benign expression, and dressed with an amount of elderly foppishness which, in a drab mid-Victorian age, was quite delightful to behold. Up the Thames—somewhere in the Hampton

Court direction, if I remember aright—where their home was, the neighbours who were “not in the know” supposed them to be stockbrokers of a sporting turn of mind. But if the Coopers took no ostensibly active part in the management of the Albion, they were most effectively represented by their head-waiter—the incomparable Paunceford. Even now, across the years, one can see his beaming face, his head held a little to one side—a propitiatory pose—his twinkling eye, his mellifluous and insinuating tone as he proceeds from box to box, half an hour, or even an hour, after closing-time, with the half-plaintive, half-humorous admonition of “Time, gentlemen, if you please!” Paunceford and the Albion should both have been made immortal. For when the Albion closed its doors, another race of waiters had arisen, and Paunceford’s occupation was gone. The last time I passed through Russell Street, Covent Garden, a merchant from the neighbouring market was running the premises as a store for fruit and vegetables. I wonder whether the ghosts of those departed who once made merry within ever appear to the eminent salesman, flitting behind his mountains of green-stuff, or playing phantom hide-and-seek among his boxes of oranges and bananas.

The first meeting between Robertson and myself was cordial enough, but though he evidently appreciated the defence of “School,” which was the basis of our friendship, it was equally apparent that he had expected to meet an older man, and one who was at least somewhere “in the movement.” When at last we were alone, he became communicative. He was at the time probably suffering from the premonitory distresses of the disease which was destined to carry him off untimely. My first impression was of the bitterness with which he discussed men and things. It was so entirely different from that which I had expected in the mood of one who stood so illuminated in the sunlight of popular approval. Fame and competence had come too late for him. The long, hungry struggle for recognition had soured a nature once, perhaps, sunny enough. More than once during our conversation he alluded to his troubles with his first success, “Society.” It had originally been

intended for Buckstone at the Haymarket—then *par excellence* the Comedy theatre ; and for six years after its refusal by Buckstone its author had hawked it about to all the London managers and to some in the provinces. I had asked him what chance of recognition a beginner at stage-writing should have with the managers. This it was that brought “ Society ” on the tapis. He drove home the lesson with the *argumentum ad hominem*. His deliverance certainly put me off any vague scheme I may have formed of commencing dramatist, and made me resolve to advance in the critical career upon which, in my youthful folly, I imagined I had successfully embarked. Speaking with great acerbity, he said :

“ I was born among stage associations. I grew up among them. It was the natural thing for me to look to the stage for my daily bread. My earliest craft was stagecraft. If I was compelled to carry about in my back-pocket for six years the play into which I had put all my experience before I could get a hearing, you can calculate for yourself the chances of an outsider.”

Reverting to the charge of having drawn on the work of others for his most popular success, he said :

“ The author of a successful play is always charged with plagiarism. It was a commonplace to accuse Sheridan of the crime. And Shakespeare was—according to the critics—the greatest thief of all. I am, at least, pilloried in good company.”

After a pause, he continued, with increased bitterness :

“ According to your critic, the only man who never plagiarizes is the dramatist who is hidebound by tradition ; whose work reeks of the essence of authors who have gone before him, or who are his contemporaries. The only originality they know of is originality of phrase. Original dramatists of the sort generally find time to do a little dramatic criticism as well, so that their case runs no danger of being understated on the press.”

I could not help reflecting at the time that of all men T. W. Robertson had least reason to complain of the indifference or the ineptitude of the dramatic critics. Alto-

gether my sentiment on bidding Robertson "Good-night" was one of depression, which quite overbalanced that feeling of elation, which a raw and callow youth would naturally experience after having enjoyed a couple of hours intimate and uninterrupted chat with the most popular dramatist of the hour.

William Brunton—that most lovable and luckless of Irishmen and artists—had given me the coveted personal introduction. Him I had met at the hatchment studio in Great Ormond Street. Brunton was himself a dabbler in heraldry, and, before he started as a comic artist on the pages of Tom Hood's *Fun*, had been something of an authority on family escutcheons. A handsome, distinguished-looking fellow was Brunton in those days. His laugh was contagious, and greeted impartially his own jokes and those of his friends. His own jokes were curious, involved, impromptus, mostly without meaning, but characterized by an irresistible quaintness of manner. His own hearty enjoyment of these cryptic *morceaux* made up for any lack of substance in the things themselves, and, by a sort of infection, aroused the laughter of his hearers. Thus I have myself roared with merriment over his report of the ultimatum delivered by the Irish widow on a third-floor-back in Clare Market to her countrywoman occupying the third-floor-front. It was the way he did it, for in cold print the joke scarcely moves even the most facile muscles :

"I declare to Hiven, Mrs. Dooley ma'am, if ye don't take yer washin' off the lobby, I'll quit th' tinimint ! There it is shmokin' like a lime-kiln, and my dog Towzer barkin' at it, thinkin' it's a robber !"

When Brunton heard of my appearance for the defence of Robertson in the matter of "School," and became acquainted with my desire to be introduced, he at once promised, in his jovial, off-hand manner, to bring about the accomplishment of my wish. That he faithfully fulfilled his undertaking has been seen. I met Brunton shortly after at the Strand Theatre. I confessed to him that Robertson's conversation had not exhilarated me, and that

I had not been prepared for a mood so pessimistic in a man so fortunate.

"That's nothin'," declared Brunton cheerily. "You should hear Tom sometimes. Last night he was denyin' th' existence of th' Almighty. Dr. Barnett, the editor of the *Sunday Times*, was present. B—— was at one time a Dissenting divine, you know, and is as orthodox as the Pope of Rome. He gently rebuked Tom. It was only addin' fuel to the flame. 'If there be a God, why don't He destroy me now?' says Tom. Then it was old Barnett's turn. With a sweet smile and the soft accent of a sort of evangelical angel, he answered: 'You forget, Tom, that the Almighty is capable of an infinite contempt!' And be jabers," concluded Brunton, "poor Robertson was as dumb as an oyster for the rest of the evening."

It was a noble retort, and it is pleasant to know that Robertson accepted it in silence, and subsequently expressed a very pretty contrition. Robertson was the first experience I had of the fact that an author's personality or temperament can rarely be gathered from his works. During my sojourn in the tents of Shem I was destined to meet many famous illustrations of the same truth.

CHAPTER III

LEARNING TO SWIM

THE receipt of a cheque in payment for the Robertson article in *Once a Week* convinced me, not only that I had discovered my *métier*, but that I had formally entered upon a profitable occupation, which would be pursued under most agreeable conditions. Let me at once confess that some years were to elapse before the returns from my literary labours amounted to a sum that would pay for my tobacco and my laundry. But if in the period of keeping my terms cheques were few and far between, I got no end of an opportunity of seeing my name in print as the author of at least one prodigious poetical work and of several essays, chiefly of dramatic criticism. It is pleasant to reflect that these exercises—early and immature though they were—brought me several friends in the literary and artistic world. At this juncture, indeed, it appeared probable that I would eventually develop into a “litory gent” whose future outlook would be that of considerable dubiety as to the respectability of the journalistic calling.

A friendly solicitor—I had been admonished to make friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness—introduced me at a City dinner to William Harrison Ainsworth, author of “The Tower of London” and other lurid romances. It was a bit of a surprise to meet the venerable man, for, truth to tell, I had thought him long since dead. He was by no means dead, however, or even apparently moribund, but extremely alive to anything that looked like business. His Manchester training never failed him to the end. He exhibited a fatherly interest in me, which was extremely

flattering to my vanity, and before we parted he had arranged a luncheon date for the following week. He was living at the time at Hurstpierpoint in Sussex. I kept the appointment, you may be well assured, and after our little midday meal the worthy exponent of Dick Turpin opened his business.

It was a simple affair. He had acquired a magazine some time before, and, finding that its circulation did not come up to his expectations, he had resold to a relative—a cousin of his own. He had agreed with the sanguine relative that he would continue to send in signed contributions, and that he would secure the services of other brilliant writers; and I was one of the “brilliant writers” whose exertions were to raise the cousin’s hopeless purchase into a position of safety. Harrison Ainsworth candidly assured me that the proprietor was not in a position to pay for the serial rights of my esteemed contributions. But the copyright should remain mine—a valuable concession and consideration!—and I should receive suitable remuneration when the magazine “turned the corner.” Ah, that fugacious corner which, always nearing, is rarely reached, and never by any chance turned! How often has it lured the novice and tempted even the needy veteran victim! I agreed to all my host’s suggestions. As I left him, he murmured a tremulous “God bless you!” and I was conscious of a fine feeling of elation as I returned to town—my star evidently in the ascendant.

If there was no money to be obtained from my new engagement, there was some fun: there was excellent practice, and there was the unexpected introduction to a “set” whose members I had always admired at a distance, but with whom my taste and training had denied me an understanding sympathy. For a while I fluttered in those reserved groves. But when at last the Street of Adventure claimed me as its own, my new associates drew me from those higher altitudes. The loss, I am sure, has all been mine.

On the magazine, to which I had pledged myself, I commenced as a poet, a poem being the only thing I had by me. The cousinly proprietor—an extremely pleasant old

gentleman, also named Ainsworth—appeared glad to accept *anything*. He was the only person whom I have known literally to laugh over misfortunes. He was a septuagenarian Mark Tapley. He gave excellent dinners at Ravenscourt Park—the house in which he entertained has long since been reduced to what printers call “pie,” its place being covered with brand-new “mansions” and “gardens” and villas. It speaks volumes for the old gentleman’s good-nature that, when my “poem” appeared, filling five pages of his periodical, he never uttered a word of rebuke or reproach. That was forty years ago, and I still regard the incident with gratitude, for the composition was a narrative of great duration. The scene was laid in Italy, the subject romantic, and the verse written in heroic couplets, interspersed with lyrics after the manner made fashionable by the Poet Laureate. I never saw it again after my first rapturous readings, but I have little doubt that it was sad stuff.

I then resolutely set myself to keep my proprietor fed up with prose essays. I had the material, and I took no end of pains with the setting. They were for the most part essays in literary criticism, and one or two of them attracted the attention of the right sort of people. Many years after its appearance, I was surprised and gratified to find one of these early articles quoted in the *Athenæum* by Theodore Watts-Dunton, and quoted, moreover, by that distinguished man of letters as being authoritative. Alas! by the time this appreciation of my literary research and criticism appeared I had ceased to take myself very seriously, and I was mixing in a society that did not take *anything* very seriously. In my early years I had the run of a good dramatic library, particularly rich in editions of the Elizabethan masters. The majority of my essays of this period were derived from those boyish studies fortified, by later browsings in the reading-room of the British Museum. The eminent but erratic Irish gentleman with whom I was reading Law had suggested the Museum, little imagining the direction which my researches there were sometimes to take.

To which of these fugitive pieces of the Ainsworthonian

period of my novitiate I owed my introduction to Madox Brown, the celebrated Pre-Raphaelite painter, I cannot distinctly recall. Clearly, it would not have been to that terrible Italian romance in heroic couplets. But the thing happened somehow, and I still remember the pleasurable sensations I experienced when Oliver, the son of the great artist, called on me by appointment and took me round to the house in Fitzroy Square, to be introduced to his father. Madox Brown was a handsome man, of medium height, broad-shouldered, with a wiry beard, at that time just beginning to show the grey autumnal tints. The charm of the man was to be caught in the sweet benignity of his expression and in the musical cadences of his voice. He was evidently the devoted family man. And it was his interest in his own children that caused him to suffer the society of other young fellows struggling for notice. Among those who dropped in at the studio that afternoon were Theo Marzials, the author of the popular "Twickenham Ferry," and Hueffer, the exponent of Wagner, who was engaged to Brown's daughter.

A reception to which I received an invitation some weeks after was my first appearance in one of the select literary circles of the capital. It was in honour of Hueffer and his bride-to-be, and was held at the Madox Brown house in Fitzroy Square on the night before the wedding. It was a rather weird experience. And not even the fact that Swinburne was present—and his was a figure to arouse all my youthful enthusiasm—reconciled me to the gathering. I felt as much alone in this crowd as I had formerly felt in the seething streets. I beat an early retreat, profoundly impressed by the reflection that I did not possess the natural adaptability which would make me an acceptable member of a society with its own especial equipment, its own passwords, and its own particular pose. I should never have become a competent authority on that which Carlyle calls "the Correggiosity of Correggio."

The Madox Brown connection led to an invitation to Westland Marston's less "precious" Sunday receptions, and to those of Lady Duffus Hardy. At the latter house I

met for the first time Joaquin Millar, the poet of the Sierras. Millar and I were to become great friends later on, but on first meeting him my feeling was one of frank dislike. At the time his pose was that of the wild man of the illimitable plains. He kept his hair in curling cataracts down his shoulders. He wore great jack-boots over his trousers, and was accustomed to appear in the Park mounted on a hack harnessed with a Mexican saddle, blinkers, and other absurd accoutrements. The rider wore a white sombrero, and gilt spurs six inches long. If his object was to attract attention, he undoubtedly succeeded. In the drawing-room of the Hardys he struck the sublimest attitudes, and, when he crossed the room, did it with a limp—because he had heard that Byron limped.

His utterances were studied with a view of occasioning surprise. He had then lately returned from a tour in Italy.

"What struck you most about Venice?" inquired one of his fair admirers.

"The bugs!" he replied with entire gravity, and stroking his golden beard.

"Oh, Mr. Millar!" exclaimed the lady, in shocked reproof.

"But," he proceeded calmly, "the bugs in Venice are not the mild domestic animals you cultivate in this country. A Venetian bug has a beard and moustache as big as the King of Italy's."

It was during this stay in England that Millar met a lady to whom he became engaged, and the poet would have married her had her parents not discovered in time that the wild man of the illimitable plains had already a wife and child stranded somewhere on the South Pacific Coast.

Joaquin Millar became in time quite a civilized Christian, and I reflect, with some natural satisfaction, that I was the humble means in the hands of Providence that, some years after our first frigid meeting, succeeded in inducing him to get his hair cut. An immense social and moral rehabilitation followed this sacrifice on the part of a poet who had his share of the Divine afflatus. What he lost in picturesqueness he gained in self-respect, and during his brief sojourns in

London he figured as a Bohemian observant of the conventions, and possessed of a certain subtle humour, which rendered his society very agreeable to his club mates at the Savage.

The travelling American millionaire is a strange portent in his way ; but to me a far more wonderful thing is the American who on a small and irregular pay, often derived from correspondence with some third-rate newspaper, supplemented by the proceeds of a few magazine articles, manages to travel all over the habitable globe. You will meet them—cultivating literature on a little oatmeal—in London, in Paris, in Rome, in St. Petersburg, in Tokio, in Honolulu. They are always waiting for remittances, and they are always on the move. One of these wanderers I met at Millar's rooms in Bloomsbury. She was a fine woman—robust, large-eyed, sentimental, but with a certain saving sense of humour. Her sole means were derived from a weekly letter written for a San Francisco newspaper. Yet she was setting out to do what she called "the grand tower." She was not so lucky as the others. I met her at the same rooms a year afterwards. She had just returned from "the grand tower." She looked awfully worn and ill, and she was accompanied by a gigantic brigand, who had not a word of any language save his own incommunicable patois. He breathed hard and scowled and shrugged his shoulders while he rolled his eyes and smoked innumerable cigarettes. His name, even when gently broken to us by his fair introducer, was a wholly impossible thing. But he was a Count—or so he said. And the infatuated correspondent of the Californian paper was "my lady," for she had married the brute. The Count had probably been a Neapolitan luggage-porter, or something of the kind, and my own private opinion is that he beat the poor woman and otherwise ill-treated her.

Charles Warren Stoddard is another name which pleasantly connects itself with those days of emergence. There are few parts of the civilized globe over which "dear Charlie"—as his intimates called him—has not trotted. He lived the absolutely "natural life" in the South Seas. The

result of that enervating experience may be seen in two very delightful books, "South Sea Idylls," published over thirty years ago, and "The Island of Tranquil Delights," published in this country a couple of years since. He travelled all over Europe, joining a monastic brotherhood at Rome. This he quitted after a few years' experience, his memories of tropical islands, perhaps, engendering a hankering after the fleshpots. On one of the Pyramids he met Williamson the actor—to become in the fulness of time Williamson the successful Australian manager—and on the tomb of the Pharaohs he gave Williamson an introduction to me, which led to a very delightful acquaintanceship. From a Japanese poet named Noguki, who recently produced a wonderful book of verse in London, I heard that he had met Stoddard in Tokio, and that he was then on his way to take up a Chair of English Literature at a University in Washington. But he must have wandered away from that place of safety, for I next heard of him as having escaped by the skin of his teeth from the awful seismic disaster in San Francisco. You don't want much money in a monastery, and you probably get enough to live on while teaching English literature to the youth of the United States. But, deducting these two brief periods of retirement from wandering, Stoddard must have moved around, surveying the wonders of the world, on an income entirely derived from fugitive articles in the papers of California.

Stoddard brought me to see Mark Twain at the Langham Hotel. The two men were great friends, and, indeed, I believe that some of the descriptive touches in the lectures delivered in London by Twain were "written in" by Stoddard. It was a fearfully foggy afternoon on which we made our call. Twain was walking up and down his sitting-room, evidently in a low key. The sight of Stoddard, however, cheered him. He pointed to a table at the end of the room, on which were ranged, in vast quantities, the materials necessary for the compounding of cocktails, and begged us to help ourselves. When we had got our medicine "fixed"—an operation which our host kindly undertook for me—Stoddard asked suddenly :

"Say, Clemens, what have you done with your shorthand writer?"

"Shot him," replied Twain grimly.

"You don't say!" exclaimed Stoddard.

"I shot him out into the fog. He couldn't hurt the fog much. Another ten minutes of him would have killed *me*."

Then came out the explanation of this short and cryptic dialogue. In genial conversation with his visitors Twain got off some uncommonly "good things," and, as he rarely recalled the items that went best, he was induced to engage a stenographer, who, concealed from him and from his visitors, should take down the coinage of his wit as it came hot from the mint. The shorthand writer was duly installed in his cave. Visitors arrived. But Twain's conversational powers had deserted him. "Couldn't scintillate worth a cent" would have been his own way of describing the situation. The knowledge of the fact that a paid reporter was taking him down seemed to sterilize his brain. The stenographer had got on the humorist's nerves. Twain before his visitors opened not his mouth.

I question, however, whether any stenographer could have conveyed, by the mere words uttered by Twain in conversation, the peculiar charm and savour of his impromptus, which lay in the manner rather than in the matter. Ready, apposite, and spontaneous, he undoubtedly was; but the melancholy drawl which he affected, the quaint American accent, the impassive features of the speaker, added enormously to the value of the utterance. And these, of course, transcend the powers of a reporter to reproduce.

Against the advice of his agent—poor old George Dolby, who had acted in the same capacity for Dickens—Twain had stopped his lectures at the Hanover Square Rooms for a "spell" in the provinces. On the evening of the day on which we called he was to resume the course which he had abandoned. The low key in which we found him was the result of the fog, in the first place; and, in the second place, he was worrying himself by recalling the warnings Dolby had given him about the danger of interrupting the course

originally, his fear of the power of some new attraction, his knowledge of the fickleness of public taste. And as the afternoon advanced the fog grew more dense. We remained with the depressed humorist until Dolby arrived to escort him to the rooms. An hour before the time for commencing the lecture all four of us got into a growler, and were swallowed by the fog. I have never measured the distance between the Langham Hotel and Hanover Square, but I think I could manage it in ten minutes. It took our cabby just three-quarters of an hour to land his fare. He lost his way twice, and finally was obliged to get off the box, engage the services of an imp carrying a link, and lead his dejected horse. Dolby had been right in getting us off early. When we arrived at the hall, we had just ten minutes in hand.

Twain was in a state of the most profound depression. Stoddard and I took our places in the front row of the stalls. The house was full of fog, and only half full of audience. Dolby afterwards told me that he had experienced the greatest difficulty in inducing Twain to appear at all. An appeal to his honour and the risk of ignoring an engagement with his public at last prevailed. About five minutes after the advertised time he came out. He advanced slowly to the very edge of the platform—the tips of his pumps, indeed, went over the edge. He craned his neck, peering through the mist. In his sad, slow way he commenced :

“ Ladies and gentlemen . . . I don’t know . . . whether you can see me or not. . . . But I’m here !”

You observe that there is nothing in the mere words. But their spontaneity and appositeness told at once. The effect was electrical. The audience was put into a good humour, and the lecture went with a roar of laughter and applause from start to finish.

Dr. Gordon Hake was a friend whom I made through a review of his “ Poems and Parables,” printed by my Tapleyan editor. Hake was a most courtly old gentleman, and when actively engaged in the pursuit of his profession—he had been a general medical practitioner—must have possessed an enviable degree of what is known among

physicians as "a fine bedside manner." The doctor had a pleasant little place at Coombe End, just beyond the spot at which Roehampton Lane impinges on Wimbledon Common. Under his hospitable roof I met one or two famous men and a goodly number of men who aspired to be famous. Of the famous men I shall here make mention of one only.

George Borrow, author of "Lavengro" and "Romany Rye," was an old friend of Hake's, and I was invited down to Coombe End to meet that very extraordinary old gentleman. Dr. Hake had taken care to warn me that it would be as well to say nothing of my contributions to periodical literature, as Borrow had a great dislike to literary persons. My claim to that description being of the slightest, I quite gladly assented, and as a result George Borrow and I became on fairly friendly terms—or I had rather put it: the Gipsy King was less bearish to me than to some of the others with whom he was thrown into contact. I did not at that time understand his hostile attitude to contemporary professors of literature. I do now. Borrow had enjoyed for a brief period the questionable delights of being lionized in London society. His "Bible in Spain" had created a furore. An immense amount of curiosity was created as to the personality of a man who had gone through the extraordinary adventures described in that romantic book. For a couple of seasons Borrow was invited everywhere, and then as capriciously he was dropped. At the end of the sixties, when I met him, the hostesses who had fought with each other for his presence could not have told you whether the great man was alive or dead.

A big, broad-shouldered, slightly stooping man, with white hair, shaven face, and bushy eyebrows, was the George Borrow whom on a fine summer afternoon I met on the lawn at Coombe End. He was dressed in rusty broad-cloth. At the moment he was about to take a walk across the common. He did me the honour to ask me to accompany him. The only book of his that I had read at that time was "The Bible in Spain." It used to be given to me when I was quite a little boy as suitable Sunday reading. It was

very unlike the general run of Sunday reading to which I had become accustomed. It was, indeed, a series of lurid adventures, hairbreadth escapes, desperate encounters, fire, thunder, murder, and sudden death—a boy's book of the most pronounced type. And its title notwithstanding, I felt, even in those young days, that the incidents related must have been evolved by the teeming imagination of a novelist.

My first walk with Borrow confirmed me in the certainty of my childish instinct. Crude uncritical people, without a due respect for literary genius, would, on the strength of his conversation during that walk of mine, have characterized him offhand as a flamboyant liar. The true explanation is that he was continually evolving or devising incidents which, once given shape, remained with him as facts to be thenceforth remembered and related as occurrences duly observed. I feel sure that Borrow firmly believed that he had personally experienced all the ebullient transactions described in his "Bible in Spain." On our way across the common he was accosted by a tramp. Borrow was infuriate. He invited the sturdy beggar to fight—he even began to divest himself of his broadcloth frock-coat ; but the beggar made off. He was in search of benefactions, not of blows. Had the beggar been a gipsy, Borrow's attitude would have been quite friendly. He would have, were it needed, administered to the wants of the swarthy nomad ; but an English beggar was in the eyes of Borrow simply an habitual criminal, and as such should be soundly trounced whenever encountered.

In a road t'other side the common he took me into a beerhouse, and called for two half-pints of "swipes." Thus in such places they call their thinnest, sourest, and cheapest ale. Borrow drank his as one enjoying a rare vintage. With difficulty I sipped a tippie, which I found to be simply villainous. In the far corner of the taproom sat a man at a table. He had finished his mug of ale, and was slumbering.

"See that fellow?" asked Borrow in an impressive stage whisper.

"Yes," I replied faintly, for the beer was positively making me ill.

"That man is a murderer. Finish your swipes. I'll tell you all about it when we get out."

And once out, he proceeded to tell me all about it. Here he was at his best. You could not help listening, admiring, and—almost—believing. It was so wonderfully done: the whole invented narrative, the squalid details, the sordid motive, the escape from justice owing to the presence on the jury of a friend of the prisoner, the verdict of "Not Guilty" rendered by an eleven of the vaunted Palladium starved into acquiescence by one determined boot-eater—all this the venerable old gentleman related with the utmost sincerity and circumstantiality.

On the following morning I took a walk across the common unaccompanied. I revisited the little swipe-shop. The man who had served us was behind the bar. He was the landlord. Did he recollect serving myself and another gentleman in the taproom on the previous afternoon? Of course he remembered. There was a third person in the taproom at the time? Of course there was. Did he know anything of that third person? Of course he did. Why, that was old William Mobbs, of Putney, carter to Mr. — (mentioning a market-gardener in the vicinity).

"Anything against him?" I inquired

"Anything agin William Mobbs!" exclaimed mine host indignantly. "William is the most virtuosiest man within a ragios of twenty mile! I b'leeve he's the qui'test, law-abidin'est old bloke in the 'ole world."

And in this way was Borrow's murderer rehabilitated for me by one who knew him.

This visit of Borrow's to Dr. Hake came to an abrupt close in a somewhat melodramatic way. Two families of gipsies set up an encampment on the common. Hosts who entertained Borrow in the country had to take their chance of an incident of that kind happening, for the gipsies seemed to scent their protector out. He spoke their language, he wrote their songs. By some of them he was known as their "King." The presence of the nomadic tribe was imme-

diately made known to Borrow by one of their dirty but intelligent scouts. The "King" thereupon made a call of ceremony upon his distinguished subjects. When he returned to Coombe End, he informed Dr. Hake that his friends the gipsies were in a difficulty about their water-supply, and that he had taken upon himself to give them permission to fill their buckets at the good doctor's well. The good doctor consented with concealed misgiving. His fears were justified. The gipsies came on to his little estate, and not only took his water, but took away anything portable that happened to be lying around.

In his most courteous manner Dr. Hake told his illustrious guest what had happened. Borrow literally raged. The man who insulted his Romany friends insulted him. His friends were incapable of any act of ingratitude to a man whose hospitality he was accepting. But the worthy Hake insisted that, as a matter of mere fact, certain fowls, linen, and garden tools, had disappeared from the place at a time which synchronized with the Romany incursion. It was enough. The incensed "Lavengro" ordered his portmanteau to be packed and taken to the station. He flung out of the house, ignoring the kindly *au revoir* of his gentle host. After many moons he came to his senses again, and was reconciled to one of the most amiable, hospitable, and accomplished men of his time.

On two or three occasions after my introduction I met Borrow in town. He had apartments near the Museum. He was invariably civil. But this I attribute to the fact that I was able to talk pugilistic lore with him, and to introduce him to Nat Langham's, a centre of "the fancy," of the existence of which it surprised me to find so great an admirer of the P.R. completely ignorant. When I proposed this excursion we were in Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, and Borrow had been met by me as he was walking along the side-path with a copy of the Old Testament in Hebrew held close to his failing eyes. He thrust the book into his pocket and accompanied me. I shrewdly suspect that this was the only occasion on which a Bible found its way into Nat Langham's famous crib.

Some time after Borrow's death I was regularly engaged in writing for the newspapers, and it came in my way to make some inquiries concerning the circumstances under which he passed away. They were grim enough. In a lonely old farmhouse, situated by the whispering reeds of a Suffolk broad, he breathed his last. He was quite alone at the time when he was *in extremis*. And when at last the massive form was found lying there, cold and stark and dead, it was gathered up and pressed into a deal box, hastily put together by the village carpenter, and despatched by rail from the nearest railway-station—a sad and tragical ending, surely, for an imperious genius who had been in his day the lion of a London season, and whose writings have established a cult comparable only to that which has arisen over Fitzgerald and the libidinous old Persian philosopher, whom he made to live again in his wonderful paraphrase.

Of Dante Gabriel Rossetti I had but a passing glimpse. The poet-painter called on George Hake (a son of Borrow's friend) when I happened to be stopping with him at Oxford. But the impression left is vivid enough. Six or seven years had passed since the bitter domestic bereavement had taken place which saddened his life and induced the habit that shortened his days. In appearance he presented neither the delicate, almost ascetic, figure of the early portraits nor the wan aspect of the later likenesses. One might have almost called him robust. He had the general aspect of a prosperous country squire. We all three chatted on current topics, and in Rossetti's contributions to the talk he was now incisive and epigrammatic, and again fanciful and quaint. He was not for a moment pessimistic or bitter. The Rossetti presented to the public is, I know, a very different sort of individual. I can only repeat that I describe the man as I saw him during the closing years of the sixties.

Mr. Hall Caine presents a Rossetti of a very different sort. In a work of autobiography that popular writer devotes the greater portion of his book to a narrative of his relations with the poet. Mr. Caine became acquainted with the poet when

his powers were decaying and his work practically finished ; when he was habitually drugged and incapable of normal emotions ; when he was deserted by his friends, and grateful for the companionship of almost anybody.

The literary venture of Mark Tapley Ainsworth failed to justify the auriferous future that his cousin, the novelist, had prophesied for it. The unfortunate owner was losing over it more money than he could afford. He called on me to announce the sad circumstance. He was as joyous as ever. He laughed merrily as he spoke of his bitter disappointment. I felt it impossible to sympathize with his mood. In my crass ignorance of the publishing world, the death of a magazine was a tragic thing. It affected me almost as the passing away of some eminent man. We lunched over the event (a sort of "wake," it seemed to me) at the Blue Posts in Cork Street, and the proprietor of the magazine, the decease of which was about to be announced, was in the gayest of spirits. After all, the dear old chap may be excused at exhibiting some feeling of relief. It had been for him, as he cheerily explained, "a matter of always paying out, and never paying in."

He certainly had not embarrassed himself by paying anything to me. But the regular occupation had been excellent practice, and the immediate ponderable result was the formation of a circle of acquaintances among literary men and artists. We drank, in excellent claret, to the resurrection of the dead periodical. But we honoured the toast as those who have no hope. Mark Tapley and I parted on excellent terms. We walked down the Burlington Arcade, and took leave of each other when we reached Piccadilly. His last word was a jape at the expense of himself and his venture. The last sound I heard of him was a particularly jolly laugh as he ambled off.

This collapse of the Ainsworthian magazine ; my "call" ; the removal from lodgings in Woburn Place to chambers in the Temple—these may be conveniently taken as roughly marking the end of my informal novitiate. I don't know whether the habit of giving "call suppers" still persists. I was persuaded that the obligation to invite my friends to

one was incumbent on me. The repast was ordered at my chambers for eight, and all my guests turned up. On the other side of Fleet Street, and nearly opposite Middle Temple Lane, was an oyster-house and restaurant called Prosser's. At that establishment the supper was ordered. I regret to say that I recollect very little of the entertainment. My health was proposed, and a bright career at the Bar foretold for me by a gentleman who is now an ornament of the judicial bench. An artist present drew a picture entitled "Coke upon Littleton," which evoked roars of laughter by reason of its audacious Rabelaisian humour. And an Hibernian journalist, who is now an English M.P., sang "The Wearin' o' the Green." I replied—coherently—to the toast of my health. After that things became a trifle blurred. Prosser had done me too well.

CHAPTER IV

INTO THE MAELSTROM

A CALL to the Bar and a residence in the Temple necessitate a somewhat intimate acquaintance with Fleet Street. But, of course, they do not make of one a Fleet Street man in the journalistic meaning of that phrase. Some time was to pass yet ere I could regard myself as free of the street—so to say. The haunts of the Templar are not those of the Pressman. The former, when of an afternoon he quits the “dusty purlieus of the Law,” usually hastens westward. The haunts of the journalist are in Fleet Street itself. Yet it was to barristers, after all, that I owed my initiation into the mysteries of the newspaper world.

In those days a considerable number of young barristers—and some old ones—were more or less dependent on their contributions to the Press for an income. Tired of idling in chambers and

“ Beckoning the tardy briefs,
The briefs that never came,”

they had struck boldly off into the whirling, throbbing life that surrounded their quiet cloisters. Among those who were to influence my career at this stage were “Willie” Dixon, son of Hepworth Dixon, the author of “Spiritual Wives” and other books which had a mighty vogue in their day, and seem now to be forgotten; Patrick Macdonald, a Scotsman with a knowledge of Law that would have landed him on the Bench had he lived to justify the opinion of the solicitors who “discovered” him too late; and Robert Williams. To the former gentlemen I owed my introduction to the Savage Club, where for a

time I became a frequent visitor, though not qualified for membership under their drastic first rule—a rule which has, I understand, become considerably relaxed, in order to give admission to that Mammon of Unrighteousness with which clubmen, among others, are commanded to “make friends.” Here, for the first time, I met some of the practical journalists—the men whose profession it was to feed the palpitating monsters of Fleet Street with their mighty pabulum of “copy.”

But my real introducer was Williams. It was to his influence that I was indebted for my “chance.” His unerring advice, his ungrudging assistance, his fine faith in my aptitude, made the beginning easy for me. Robert Williams was, perhaps, the most remarkable man of his time in the Street of Adventure. He was a Welshman, with but little of the Welsh temperament save the hopefulness characteristic of that race. He was a graduate of Jesus College, Oxford, becoming thereafter a Fellow of Merton. His nickname at the University was “Scholar” Williams, which sufficiently indicates the sort of reputation he had acquired. He was one of the finest Greek scholars of his day. His “Notes on Aristotle” are still regarded as authoritative by examiners. He was, I think, tutor both to Lord Rosebery and Lord Lansdowne. He was a member of the Reform Club before he had ever seen Pall Mall. Lord Rosebery took a great interest in the career of Williams after he left Oxford and had flung himself into Fleet Street, for he married and threw up his Fellowship.

Lord Rosebery’s influence took an extremely practical turn. For instance, he bought the *Examiner* for Williams. But the “Scholar,” although a very accomplished contributor, had not been cut out by Nature for an editor. This he proved, not only in his conduct of the *Examiner*, but in the founding and editorial management of a venture which followed. He sold the property which Lord Rosebery had made over to him, and with the proceeds started a weekly illustrated paper called *Sketch*—to be distinguished from *The Sketch* belonging to the Ingram group, a much more recent candidate for popular favour. The capital

which Williams had acquired by the sale of the *Examiner* was only sufficient to keep his new venture running for a few weeks. He transferred it to an owner of sporting papers, in whose hands it died the death.

But the finest journalistic work of "Scholar" Williams may be seen in his leading articles in the *Daily Telegraph*. For some years he was retained on the staff of that journal, transferring his services eventually to the *Standard*. He had a prodigious memory. In that respect he was the equal of Lord Macaulay. Indeed, at Oxford he was always regarded as a "coming Lord Macaulay." He knew Dickens by heart, and his apposite quotations from that author are more frequent than allusions from Aristotle. He had a very keen sense of humour, and in exercising his gifts in that way he had no sort of compunction. Indeed, I fear that to his habit of "giving away the secrets of the Prison House" in humorous recital and to mixed audiences may be attributed the events which immediately preceded his transference from Peterborough Court to Shoe Lane.

A striking appearance was that of Robert Williams. I can recall vividly his form at this moment as he makes his way down Fleet Street. In figure he was a miniature Dr. Johnson—bulky, short in the neck and short in the sight. He had a broad, clean-shaven face, and, so far as his features were concerned, possessed the true forensic aspect. He went always clad in black, and invariably proceeded down the street with a book or a paper held close to his eyes. As he forged his way ahead he constantly collided with citizens hastening in the opposite direction. These frequent impacts did not seem to retard his progress or inconvenience in any way the stolid scholar who walked slowly and serenely on, oblivious of the frequent rebukes and objurgations which his progress evoked. He had a loud, metallic voice, which in conversation was always raised, so that his observations were heard by persons at a considerable distance off. His laugh—well, it did you good to hear Williams laugh at a joke, his own or another's.

Williams, too, was a man who could not only laugh at a

joke against himself, but could even tell a joke against himself. One of these stories is worth recalling in this place, although it has to do, not with his journalistic, but with his barristerial work. I may perhaps premise this, as elucidatory of the point of the narrative : Montagu Williams was at that time one of the most popular men at the Criminal Bar. He was the terror of evil-doers. And if he were engaged for the prosecution, the unfortunate man in the dock often pleaded guilty, "lest a worse thing happen unto him."

It happened that Robert Williams was briefed one day to prosecute a prisoner for burglary. The trial took place at the Old Bailey, and Williams was seated just beneath the dock, and well within hearing of anything that might transpire there. The prisoner was duly put forward, the indictment read, and the malefactor asked to plead. Williams then heard the following whispered colloquy take place between the accused man and the warder :

"Who's a-prosecutin' me?" inquired the caged gaol-bird.

"Mr. Williams," whispered the warder.

"GUILTY, me lord!" said the prisoner to the court in the accent of penitential despair.

In due course Williams rose to enlighten the tribunal as to certain incidents in the previous career of the individual whom he was endeavouring to consign to "chokey." The thread of his narrative was, however, cut by the following conversation, hurriedly battledored between the burglar and his custodian :

"I thort," said the man, indignantly reproachful, "you said as Mister Williams was a-prosecutin' me."

"Well," replied the warder, "that *is* Mr. Williams—Mr. Robert Williams."

"Oh!" exclaimed the prisoner, as one become the subject of a sudden illumination. "I thought you meant Mr. *Montagu* Williams. I ain't a-goin' to plead guilty to that little beggar. . . . NOT GUILTY, me lord!"

It is satisfactory to be able to add that on this occasion, and in spite of his amended plea, Williams succeeded in consigning his cynical detractor to a long term of imprisonment.

Once I accompanied Williams to the Court of Queen's Bench. On that occasion he was less triumphant. It was at the old Courts in Westminster. Williams had to move for a new trial before three of Her Majesty's Judges. One of them happened to be Blackburn. Williams moved on three points. He had said but a few words on the first of these heads, when Blackburn, with that brutal disregard for the susceptibilities of the Junior Bar for which he was notorious, cut my unfortunate friend short with the request : "Get on with your next point."

Somewhat abashed, Williams proceeded to open his second argument. He had barely stated his point, when his tormentor again interrupted with—

"Let us hear what you've got to say about your third reason."

Williams was nettled. The influential solicitor who had instructed him was in court. He felt that he must make a stand for his client.

"I trust, my lord, that I am not irrelevant," he ventured, with a tone of offended dignity.

"*But you are !*" was the brusque retort of Blackburn (J.).

The effect of this rebuff was so considerable that Williams attacked his third point without spirit, without interruption, and without success.

I have said that some of the finest journalistic work of Robert Williams appeared as "leaders" in the *Daily Telegraph*. I might go farther. In my opinion, some of those leading articles were, for trip, style, reasoning, and allusiveness, the best things that had ever appeared in that newspaper. I am speaking now of the best of Williams, for he was an unequal writer, and his success depended much on the sympathy evoked by his subject. He threw the essays off with consummate ease. I remember congratulating him on this wonderful facility

"Nothing in it, my dear fellow," he replied. "You've only to follow strictly the rule of our office, and your leader will come as easy as sand off a shovel."

"And the rule?"

"All leaders," he replied, "are divided into three para-

graphs, and no paragraph must begin with the word 'The.' Simple, ain't it? Eh, what?"

An answer which seemed rather to argue that, his extraordinary journalistic capacity notwithstanding, he regarded the Press with a sentiment not far removed from cynical contempt.

And yet to have taken a first place as a writer on a journal boasting such a staff as the *Telegraph* then possessed should have gratified the ambition of any ordinary man. Mr. (subsequently Sir) Edwin Arnold was really Editor, though nominally working under the direction of Mr. Edward Lawson (now Lord Burnham). A courteous and accomplished gentleman, Arnold will perhaps be remembered by posterity in respect of his "Light of Asia." That poem was an awakening for the easy-going, slow-thinking, credulous, missionary-meeting-supporting British public, who had been taught from infancy that Buddha was a false god, and the centre of a foul and degrading faith. To Sir Edwin Arnold is mainly due the fact that in England to-day there are thousands who have some appreciation of the life and the doctrines of "the teacher of Nirvana and the Law." Sir Edwin had the courage of his Oriental convictions. He chose as his second wife a Japanese lady.

But the writer who had given the *Telegraph* its peculiar *cachet*, and whose work was readily recognized by the readers of the paper, was George Augustus Sala. Sala, I maintain, was the best all-round journalist of his time. Nothing came amiss to him. Although the *Saturday* and *Matthew* might affect to sneer at the erudition of his "leaders," it may be mentioned here that those superior critics sometimes mistook for Sala's the work of Williams, whose scholarship was at least equal to that of the detractors. As a descriptive writer, Sala was quite without a rival, and the public soon "tumbled" to his piping. The early vogue of the "*Telly*" was due to his brilliant and unceasing series of pen-pictures. One saw the pageants that he wrote about. Coronations, royal functions, the marriage of Princes, great cathedral services—these incidents lived again in his vivid columns. Sala's versatility was amazing. He wrote at

least one remarkable novel ; he illustrated some of his own humours ; he is the author of a ballad—printed for private circulation only—of which Swift would have been proud. His “ Conversion of Colonel Quagg ” is one of the most humorous short stories ever written. He wrote an excellent burlesque for the Gaiety Theatre. His articles on Hogarth, contributed to the *Cornhill*, at the suggestion of Thackeray, exhibit him as an art critic of insight and of profound technical knowledge. His lectures on the conflict between North and South, delivered on his return from his mission as Special Correspondent during the American War, drew the town. He was a fine linguist, and, at a time when the art of after-dinner speaking was still held in some repute, he was easily first among many rivals. In the preface to one of his books, he says of the proprietors of the paper with which he was identified : “ They accorded me the treatment of a gentleman and the wages of an Ambassador.” It is pleasant to be able to reflect that, however high the scale of remuneration may have been, Sala was always worth a bit more than his pay.

There is one phrase of Sala’s which, by means of quotation, has become a household word. “ ‘ Sir,’ said Dr. Johnson, ‘ let us take a walk down Fleet Street,’ ” is piously repeated even by well-informed literary persons as a saying of the great dictionary-maker duly recorded in Boswell’s “ Life.” Johnson and Boswell were both innocent of it. The saw was one of Sala’s harmless forgeries, and was used by him as the motto of *Temple Bar* when he edited that magazine. There appeared in *Punch* one week a clever skit entitled “ Egoes of the Week.” This was a travesty of an article which Sala was then contributing to the *Illustrated London News* under the title of “ Echoes of the Week.” The parody was merciless, and, as some thought, malicious. The weaknesses of Sala’s manner were rendered with laughable exaggeration. His peculiarities of diction were ruthlessly imitated and emphasized. Some of his friends hoped to see him incensed, and looked forward eagerly for reprisals. But Sala took the attack lying down, emulating the spirit of his own Colonel Quagg. And the reason for this evidence

of magnanimity under attack somewhat puzzled his associates until it was discovered that the *Punch* parody was written by Sala himself !

Godfrey Turner was another of the "handy-men" of the *Telegraph*. He had not that *élan* in style which characterized his colleague Sala, but he was a most agreeable essayist, and turned out some extremely neat *vers de société*. His song, supposed to be written by Boswell on Dr. Johnson, has genuine humour. Boswell sets out sober in the first stanza ; he becomes merry as he proceeds ; when he gets to the last verse he is drunk, and blurts out his real opinion of the great lexicographer. That catastrophic verse ran something like this, I think :

" ' The man that makes a pun,' says he,
 ' Would e'en commit a felony,
 And hang'd he deserves to be '—
 Says (*hic*) that old fool Doctor Johnson."

Turner was a bit of a purist, and sought always for the fittest word ; and he was as particular in his dress as in his "copy." He was a stickler for "good form," and sometimes, when engaged on a mission, would offer a gentle hint to some eager correspondent whose manner in public offended his fastidious taste. Sometimes the hint was taken in good part ; sometimes it was resented. On one occasion it secured for poor Godfrey a retort which covered him for a moment with ridicule. It happened in this way :

Some sapient person in society had come to the conclusion that the ordinary coffin was not constructed on the right hygienic principles. He contended that we should, when our turns came, be buried in coffins made of wicker-work. He constructed quite a number of these melancholy receptacles. They were brought to Stafford House for exhibition, and the leaders of Society and the representatives of the Press were invited to inspect. I attended the quaint and rather gruesome collection. Among the other journalists present were my friend Godfrey Turner and Humphreys, the sub-Editor of the *Morning Post*. Humphreys was an Irishman, a hopelessly eccentric individual, negligent in his dress and flamboyant in his manner. He was a fine fellow,

however, had a head and beard like those attributed to Homer, and was every inch a gentleman. His foible was a belief in spiritualism. That he really believed in the actual presence of the dear departed I am convinced, for I have been in his company in the Strand and close to the offices of his own paper when he has interrupted the conversation to speak with the spirit of his great-grandfather, which had just made its presence known to him. The coffins at Stafford House seemed to appeal to his sense of humour. He became quite hilarious over them, and addressed several of the noble persons present by name, slapping belted Earls on the back, and repeating his cemetery jokes for the benefit of Countesses. This affronted the fastidious taste of Turner, who at last got Humphreys into a corner, and thus gently admonished him :

“ I say, my dear fellow, *do* let us try and behave like gentlemen !”

“ Thry away, me boy. It costs *me* no effort !” exclaimed Humphreys, leaving his discomfited friend for the society of a Viscount.

Clement Scott was another of the “ young lions.” He was not very popular with the other members of the staff. Sala, I know, disliked him, for he told me so. Scott was the dramatic critic of the paper. He wrote a sugary, young-ladylike style that “ took ” with a large section of the public. It was a chocolate-creamy style, and “ went down ”—like chocolate creams. He understood the value of a phrase, and when he got hold of an effective one he ran it to death. For instance, there are poppies in the cornfields round Cromer. Probably there is a much greater profusion of poppies in cornfields in Kent or in Bucks, but Scott gives to Cromer a kind of monopoly in the right sort of poppy. The country in that part of East Anglia he “ wrote up ” as “ Poppyland,” to the great advantage of the Great Eastern Railway Company, to which corporation he became a sort of unofficial Poet Laureate. When I first knew him, Scott had not yet “ discovered ” Cromer or written the syrupy sentiments of “ The Garden of Sleep.” He was eloquent at that period over the beauties of the Isle of Thanet, for

"Clemmy" was a personal friend of Mr. Joseph Moses Levy, the principal proprietor of the *Telegraph*, and was frequently his guest somewhere in the neighbourhood of Ramsgate. Clement Scott always took himself very seriously. Now, that was a pose rarely adopted by the journalists of my day. We regarded our calling as a means of obtaining a livelihood, certainly, and to that extent a serious occupation, but in the pursuit of it we gave ourselves no airs. We considered the whole business rather good fun, and were upheld by a consciousness of the fact that we were all more or less humbugs. Scott's nonsense, however, suited the nonsense of the followers of Peterborough Court, and at a time of general scepticism it was refreshing to encounter a man who believed in something, even if that something happened to be himself.

Another of the "young lions" who roared in the Peterborough Court menagerie was Drew Gay. Phil Robinson perched for a while on the staff, and flitted elsewhere. All those I have named have finished their accounts with this world. Bennet Burleigh still lives, a prosperous gentleman, and the doyen of war-correspondents. Burleigh professed strong Socialistic principles at a time when they were regarded by respectable people as the most damnable heresies. My first experience of a Socialist Club was gained through Bennet Burleigh. He introduced me one night to the Social Democratic Club. This select association held its meetings in the cellars of a new building in Chancery Lane. One had to dive down two flights of stone steps to the subterranean rooms of the club. The rooms were full of gaunt, long-haired men of both home and foreign growth, and women in clinging (and not very cleanly) raiment. Whiskies and sodas were hospitably dispensed, and most of the women were smoking cigarettes and trying to look as though they were quite used to it and liked it. I encountered Dr. Tanner, the Member for Mid-Cork. He introduced me to a bright, interesting old lady, whose name I forget. We had an edifying chat, she and I, and when, a few nights afterwards, I met Tanner in the Lobby of the House of Commons, I asked him about the lady to whom he had introduced me.

"Oh," replied Tanner good-humouredly, "that was the celebrated Madeline Smith. She is a married woman now."

"You don't mean Madeline Smith, the murderess?" I asked.

"I mean Madeline Smith, who was *tried* for murder, and for whom the jury found a Scotch verdict of 'Not proven,'" he reminded me.

"And of such is the Social Democratic Club?" I observed.

"Que voulez-vous?" said Tanner, shrugging his shoulders.

But I have wandered somewhat wide of the matter in hand, which was to afford a little idea of the principal members of the staff among whom Robert Williams became enrolled.

Fleet Street—the thoroughfare itself, I mean—has undergone considerable change since those days. Nearly all the Dickens features have been shorn away from it, and the Dickens-land that impinged upon it has ceased to be recognizable. From the West we then entered Fleet Street through Temple Bar. In the north wing of that historic but obstructive gateway an old barber plied his calling. He reminded me of Mr. Krook in "Bleak House." He was never what you would call quite sober. His face was blotched and fiery with his excesses, and his hand that held the razor trembled so violently that one wondered how he got through the day without wounding some of his customers. Once the operation commenced, however, the trembling ceased, and the razor sped unerring, steady, expert. What became of the old fellow when Temple Bar was taken down I have never heard. He would hardly, I imagine, have survived his disestablishment.

Sir Henry Meux bought the old structure, and had the Bar erected again as one of the entrances to Theobald Park. I have no doubt that Lady Meux had a word to say in the matter, for Lady Meux was a "sport" all over. I first knew her as Valerie Reece, of the Gaiety Theatre, where she was noted as being the most high-spirited of an extremely high-spirited lot. Her early days at Theobald Park were remarkable for some sporting events of a novel and exciting kind. Thus—or so the story went—her ladyship

ordered a cargo of monkeys from India, and had the unfortunate Simian immigrants let loose in the park. As they fled gibbering from branch to branch, the determined little sportswoman took pot-shots at them, and had good fun while the supply held out.

Close by Temple Bar stood the old "Cock" Tavern. It was a snug, smelly, inconvenient, homely, stuffy, and (I should imagine) hopelessly insanitary old crib, much resorted to by barristers at lunch-time, for the chops and steaks were excellent. The "Cock" port was also reputed above reproach, but I never quite acquired the port habit, and should not like to obtrude my opinion; but I "hae ma doots." The tavern will live for a while in Tennyson's lines:

"O plump head-waiter at the Cock,
To which I most resort,
How goes the time? 'Tis five o'clock.
Go fetch a pint of port."

And one notes here that Tennyson owns up to the barbarous custom of drinking port at five o'clock in the afternoon! Well, the "Cock" has gone by the board. A curious incident disturbed its declining days. A carved rooster was the sign of the tavern, and stood over the narrow entrance in Fleet Street. While the owner was under notice to quit his building, the sign was stolen one night, and has never been recovered from that day to this. Another "Cock" Tavern has been opened on the opposite side of Fleet Street, and lower down. This place also displays as its sign a carved rooster, which is believed to be the original from over the way. But it is *not* the original bird. That ancient fowl has become the property of the great American people. The wonder to me is how they missed collaring Temple Bar!

The widening of Fleet Street by throwing back the building line of the south side has naturally involved the removal of a good number of landmarks; and even where the widening has not been carried out, one observes, with certain pangs of regret, the disappearance of some well-beloved feature. The banking-house of Hoare ("Mr. W.," as the squeamish

lady called him) still stands, the carved wallet in its forefront bearing witness to the "pride that apes humility."

But Gosling's, as I knew it, is gone. Gosling's I have always identified with Tellson's in "A Tale of Two Cities." "It was very small, very dark, very ugly, very incommensurable. . . . After bursting open a door of idiotic obstinacy with a weak rattle in its throat, you fell into Tellson's down two steps, and came to your senses in a miserable little shop, with two little counters where the oldest of men made your cheque shake as if the wind rustled it while they examined the signature by the dingiest of windows, which were always under a shower-bath of mud from Fleet Street." The description exactly fits Gosling's before it got itself a new façade and became the mere branch of a bigger bank. And the Dickens Fellowship should have looked to it, and preserved for the nation this memorial of the master.

Close by was a shop for the sale of mechanical toys, in the window of which a steamer laboured heavily in a sou'-westerly gale, the rolling waves kept in a state of agitation by clockwork, and the whole effect being particularly real and naturalistic. The proprietor of this scientific toy-shop was eventually attacked by the virus that runs through Fleet Street. He became a newspaper proprietor, and a successful one. His translation happened in this way: Young Kenealy, son of the eminent but erratic counsel for the Claimant, founded a paper called *Modern Society*. His pious object was to rehabilitate his late father, and this could only be accomplished by reopening the whole of the dreary Tichborne case, of which the public was heartily sick. The paper did not pay, and it was eventually acquired, as a property, by the owner of the clockwork ocean. He, worthy man, had no axe to grind. He retained the services of a pliant editor, and made the organ a vehicle for that sort of gossip which goes down so well with suburban matrons. The paper went up by leaps and bounds. The new proprietor gave himself airs, dressed the part, exhibited himself in the Park, and in a brief period had managed to shed all traces of the obsequious Fleet Street

tradesman. He crossed the bar years since—perhaps in his mechanical steamer—but his paper persists to this day.

At the corner of Chancery Lane, and above the shop of Partridge and Cooper, was a new restaurant called "The London." The proprietor was a sanguine man, but made the mistake of being a little before his time. The Fleet Street men of his period preferred to lunch and dine uncomfortably. The owner of "The London" did us too well, and attended too scrupulously to the nicer amenities of the table. We tried the establishment, and then returned to our husks. Outside the new restaurant stood a burly commissioner, with puffy red cheeks and purple nose. When the restaurant closed its doors for ever, the commissioner remained, eager to perform the errands of all and sundry. He was rather a picturesque old fellow, and was for a long time one of the features of that end of the street. He wore a red shako, which added greatly to the picturesqueness of his appearance, and I should not be surprised to learn that in private life he drank heavily.

The favourite luncheon haunts of the journalist in the consulate of Plancus were the Cheshire Cheese in Wine Office Court, and the refreshment bar of Spiers and Pond at Ludgate Hill Railway-Station. At the latter place, between the hours of one and three, you were pretty certain to meet a number of confrères. Christopher Pond, one of the partners who ran the bar and restaurant at Ludgate Hill, was to be seen here on most days of the week. He was a big, broad-shouldered, hearty man, who made no secret of his desire to conciliate the members of the London Press. Among those who were daily worshippers at this shrine were Tom Hood, the Editor of *Fun*; Henry Sampson, then one of Hood's staff, but afterwards to become famous as the founder of the *Referee*; "Bill" Brunton, the artist; Charles Williams, the war-correspondent; and John Augustus O'Shea, of the *Standard*. John Corlett used to drop in occasionally, and John Ryder, who lived down the line, invariably called in on his way to the theatre. Ryder was a fine raconteur, and he had the largest and most varied assortment of amusing reminiscences of any man I have

ever met. Mr. Henry Labouchere used to tell a story of "Jack" Ryder which was eminently characteristic of the actor. When Labouchere produced "The Last Days of Pompeii" at the old Queen's Theatre in Long Acre, Ryder was his stage-manager, and, in his desire to make the production as naturalistic as possible, he asked Labouchere to obtain some real lions. Labouchere demurred; Ryder pleaded.

"But," objected Labouchere at last, "suppose the lions broke loose?"

"Well," answered John cheerily, "they'd have to eat the band first."

Another habitué of the Ludgate Hill resort was Louis Lewis. This extraordinary little man was a brother of the late George Lewis. Like his more illustrious relative, Louis also was a solicitor. One day Brunton had been having his lunch at the table in the corner, and before leaving the artist had made a drawing, on the tablecloth, of a somewhat Rabelaisian character. Louis Lewis entered as Brunton left, and took the seat which had been vacated by the artist. He at once saw the drawing, which appealed to such sense of humour as he possessed, and began to ogle it, laughing with a peculiar subdued chuckle which was peculiarly his own. At that moment Christopher Pond happened to come in. He noticed the mirth of little Louis, and proceeded to ascertain the cause of it. When he grasped the gross intention of the drawing, and as he conceived Lewis to be the author of it, he became extremely indignant, ordered his waiters to turn the innocent and protesting man off the premises, and informed those trembling menials that if any of them ever served the offender again it would mean instant dismissal. The smirched cloth was then removed, and at the laundry all evidence that could convict the real culprit was in due course destroyed. But the incensed solicitor served a writ on Pond the very next day, and the action was "settled out of court."

There was a gentleman connected with the sporting Press in the seventies called Barney Briant. No one knew exactly what it was he wrote, or whether he wrote at all, but he had

obtained an undoubted reputation as a sporting writer of parts. His most salient physical peculiarity consisted in the fact that his elbows seemed to have become glued to his sides. If Barney shook hands with a man—and he was for ever shaking hands—he moved his arm from the elbow only, never from the shoulder. I observed on this peculiarity to Reginald Shirley Brooks (assuredly one of the most amiable and most talented of the men of his time), and his explanation was illuminating.

"You see," said Shirley, "Barney spends nearly the whole day in the narrow passage in front of the Cheshire Cheese bar. To do this in comfort, he has to keep his elbows well screwed in, to let the customers pass to and from the dining-room. In the course of generations the arms of his descendants will grow from the waist."

The incident is recorded in this place as illustrating better than any mere verbal description the exiguous nature of the main passages of the Cheshire Cheese. The bar in the passage has been disestablished this many a year. It was a sort of glass case with barely room for two barmaids, a beer-engine, and some shelves of bottles. Sala called it "the bird-cage," and the name stuck to the structure ever after. In recent years the Cheshire Cheese has attracted a considerable clientele on a claim that it was the favourite Fleet Street resort of Dr. Johnson. Mr. Seymour Lucas, the Royal Academician, indeed, adopted the theory without any exhaustive inquiry, and painted a picture in which the Great Bear is depicted "taking his ease" in this inn. There are some things which we may not know about the author of "Rasselas," but among them, most assuredly, cannot be numbered the houses of entertainment which he frequented. Boswell followed old man Johnson about to all his "pubs," and the fact that there is no mention in Boswell's "Life" of his hero having visited the "Cheese" is evidence presumptive that he never *did* visit it. In his time the tavern in Wine Office Court was the nightly resort of the respectable tradesmen of Fleet Street who still lived above their shops—the last sort of company upon which the Doctor would think of intruding.

But if the Johnson legend must be dismissed as mythical, the chops, steaks, beefsteak puddings, and stewed cheeses, were substantial and indisputable. Godfrey Turner wrote in one of the Christmas annuals, then in great favour, a description of a meal at the Cheshire Cheese. The thing was wonderfully well done, and gave considerable umbrage to the proprietor, and to some of the literary gentlemen whom the writer introduced. The waiter in the room downstairs was one Tom Brown, who used to drive up from his place in the suburbs in a smart dogcart. William, who had no other name, was a short red-haired man with (appropriately enough) mutton-chop whiskers, very prominent teeth, a pink-and-white complexion, and a perennial sheep-like smile. Diners gave him their orders with minute particularity, assured that he would communicate their wishes to the cook, which William never did. This is the sort of thing that would happen :

FIRST CUSTOMER : " A mutton chop very well done, please, waiter."

WILLIAM : " Well done, sir ? Yessir."

SECOND CUSTOMER : " Underdone chop, William."

WILLIAM : " Chop underdone, sir ? Very good, sir."

[Exit WILLIAM.]

WILLIAM (*heard without*) : " Cook, two muts down together, cook !"

On Saturday an enormous beefsteak pudding delightfully fortified with larks, oysters, mushrooms, and other seasoning, was served. This monster of the pudding tribe was put down to boil at one o'clock in the morning, and was served with great ceremony at one o'clock on the afternoon of the same day. Moore, the proprietor, cut the savoury mountain up. Every seat was taken a quarter of an hour before the dish made its appearance, and late-comers had to turn disconsolate away. On one fateful morning—a cold, foggy day in mid-winter—the usual congregation of pudding-worshippers had gathered together, hungry, expectant, keen-set. At the stroke of one the step of William was heard on the stair, and a pungent steam was wafted to the waiting gourmets. Then all at once was heard a slip, a groan, and,

last of all, an awful crash. William, with the pudding in his arms, had slipped on the top of the flight of stairs leading to the hall, and the place was flooded with broken pudding-bowl and dismembered pudding, now mixing itself ineffectually with the sawdust of the floor. Mingled sighs and oaths arose on all sides. The mischief was, alas ! irreparable.

After this, William was pensioned off by Moore, but the devoted old man could not be induced to quit the scene in which most of his life had been passed. He was not permitted to resume his official position as a waiter, but he turned up every morning at his usual time, and remained on the premises until closing-time. They were puzzled at first what to do with him. At last it was resolved to put him into a leather apron, and let him pretend to be having a very busy time in the cellar. From that cool and cobwebby grot he made frequent emergences during meal-times to indulge the one pleasure left him—that of a little familiar talk with an old customer. One day William was missed and his old customers knew instinctively that he was dead. The old fellow left considerable personalty and some real estate.

I have now tried to sketch, however indifferently, some of the centres round which the Fleet Street maelstrom roared. Ceaselessly for more than twenty years I whirled round and round in its irresistible eddies. One never hoped, one never wished, for deliverance from the seething circle. Once caught up in it, the daily round was discovered to possess a fascination overwhelming, imperious, inexorable. It was a career the most strenuous, at once, and the most irresponsible. There was a sense of freedom, yet one was a slave of the lamp ; a feeling of power, yet one was the mere mouthpiece of an organ. By the outsider one was alternately hated and courted, and one went one's way.

As free-lance, as a member of a "staff," as special correspondent, as leader-writer, book-reviewer, and dramatic critic, my experience has been considerable, and I have generally found my work delightful ; but its greatest charm, after all, has been in the society of the comrades whom I

have met by the way. Good-fellowship, loyalty to one another, a fine sense of chivalry, a constant readiness to help the lame dog over the style, a stern ostracism of the unhappy wight who evinced a congenital inability to play the game—these were the characteristics of the men of my time. Sitting down in the afternoon of my day to recall that pleasant past, I now, as I intimated in my opening chapter, drop all pretence of sequent autobiography, and proceed to present such groups and incidents, such characters and scenes, such *mots* and anecdotes, as may appeal to those who live in another time and pursue their calling under other conditions.

CHAPTER V

SOCIETY JOURNALISM

"Sassiaty is Sassiaty : its lors ar irresistibl."—*Yellowplush Papers*.

SOCIETY journalism had been founded just before I began to earn a "living wage" in Fleet Street, but its development and popularity were items of later history. The ball was set rolling by Mr. Thomas Gibson Bowles—to become known in other times as the intractable Conservative Member of Parliament, and the beloved "Tommy" Bowles of the man in the street. The familiar sobriquet only got into print after Bowles captured King's Lynn in the Tory interest, but he was called by that playful diminutive long before he entered the House of Commons, although he himself was probably unaware, as he would certainly resent, the fact. Pottinger Stephens bestowed upon him the familiar name, and in Fleet Street and the Strand he was always known to his Press contemporaries as "Tommy."

That this gentleman should have turned Liberal in his old age, and that he should have captured his ancient Conservative stronghold in Lynn for the Rads, will not seem at all extraordinary to those who are a little behind the scenes. Those who accomplish a great deal for their party naturally expect that their party will do a little for them, provided they possess the necessary qualifications. Tommy certainly had the qualifications, and it is equally certain that he "put in" a lot of good work for the Tories; but he was never a *persona grata* with his leaders. The Conservatives are rather stupid on matters of birth and parentage, and Bowles did not come up to their standards. Having fought and lost two elections "on his own," the party sent him

down to a forlorn hope at Lynn. To their surprise and disgust he won the seat. For years he served the Tories loyally in Parliament, but when there came a division of loaves and fishes, Bowles was invariably left out of the reckoning. In the last Parliament in which he sat on the Conservative benches, he fell foul of his party, and personally attacked his hereditary leaders. From his place he alluded to the Salisbury administration as "the Hôtel Cecil," and described the Front Bench as "a gallery of family portraits."

Bowles acquired his knowledge of journalism and his respect for the conventions of Society on the *Morning Post*. He had started life, I believe, in Somerset House, which was just over the way, and he became imbued with the notion—a very profitable notion, as it turned out—that a paper chiefly devoted to the "hupper suckles," written in their interests, and employing what he used to call "the passwords of Society," should be a financial success. To what extent (at that period) Bowles was in Society, or how he obtained a knowledge of its passwords, or what those cryptic passwords were, I have never been able to find out; but, as one astute editorial admonition is "Know what you don't know!" those same passwords may have been part of a pleasant myth.

His paper was duly launched at the price of twopence, and under the admirable title of *Vanity Fair*. But the paper, smartly and even wittily written as it was, would have failed to reach the somewhat inaccessible class for which its founder proposed to cater had it not been for his discovery of Pellegrini, and the appearance in *Vanity Fair* of that Italian artist's inimitable cartoons. The price was raised to sixpence, the paper hit those remote circles for which it had been destined, "Tommy's" career was assured, and Society journalism was established in our midst.

A tremendous number of imitators have sprung up from time to time—"they had their day, and ceased to be"—but there were only two other publications that enjoyed permanent success; and those two, with the first Society organ founded by Mr. Bowles, constituted, and still con-

stitute, what is understood as Society journalism. The second paper in the trio was *The World*, founded by Edmund Yates; and the third was *Truth*, established by Henry Labouchere. I was fortunate enough to write for all three; for two of them I have written voluminously.

Bowles used to aver that he had no staff. He wrote a great deal of the paper himself, and his "Jehu Junior" articles, written to accompany the cartoons, were models of what essays should be. Light, epigrammatic, pungent, and excessively neat, they were the one possible accompaniment to "Ape's" caricatures. A sentence from the "Jehu Junior" article always appeared beneath the picture. I can recall a couple. Beneath the first picture of Disraeli was inscribed: "He educated his party, and dished the Whigs to pass Reform, but to have become what he is from what he was is the greatest reform of all." When Bishop Magee made his great speech in the House of Lords in defence of the Irish Church, his likeness appeared in the *Vanity Fair* gallery, and it had appended to it this extract from the article by Bowles: "If eloquence could justify injustice, he would have saved the Irish Church." And the output of the able little editor was always up to sample.

Although Bowles professed to conduct his paper without the aid of a staff, he engaged regular contributors, which is pretty much the same thing. These gentlemen were never consulted in a body. "Collectivity" was never "pretty Fanny's way," as the Tory party, too late, discovered. But individual members of the body of contributors were occasionally summoned to meet their editor and proprietor at his chambers. When I was first ushered into the august presence, Bowles had rooms in Palace Chambers, at the corner of St. James's Street, over against the Palace itself. He had just commenced his yachting career at that period, and adopted the mariner's pose ashore to the extent of receiving you in his bare feet—to give the impression, I suppose, of rolling seas and a slippery deck.

But if one did not meet one's confreres in the rooms of the editor, we were bound to encounter in the outer world—perhaps at the printer's or elsewhere. The printer was

Peter Rankin, of Drury Court—a dour and adventurous Scot who, having conveyed a newspaper by means of registration from its rightful owner, continued the management of the property on his own account. He had not the success which usually attends these Napoleonic sportsmen in the Street of Adventure. He came to grief and death, and nobody seemed to care. At his printing-offices I met for the first time Willmott Dixon, then a contributor under the Bowles banner. Dixon was at that time a fresh-coloured, stout, broad-shouldered man with an indomitably sweet temper which indicated its permanence in a dimple in the cheek.

Willmott Dixon had brought into Fleet Street with him much of the ebullient spirit and readiness for practical fun for which he was noted at Cambridge in his undergraduate days. Bon-vivant, raconteur, and essentially good fellow, he was in general demand as a companion. After the days of our *Vanity*, I was associated with Dixon on many other papers, for he had the pen of a ready writer, and was in considerable demand. Of all the men I have known, he was the quickest producer of “copy,” and he seemed capable of coming up with his tale of work under any and all conditions. His sporting articles and stories under the *nom de plume* of “Thormanby” are well known, and his accounts of the old prize-fights are the best ever written. The amount of “copy” produced by Dixon would equal that of any three ordinary journalists; taking a period of years in the productive stage of each. But why should I speak of Willmott Dixon in the past tense? He is now a hale young fellow of seventy, and within the last few years he has published three successful novels under his own name, one collection of sporting stories under his *nom de plume* of “Thormanby,” and an autobiography entitled “The Spice of Life.” This is the sort of veteran whom Mr. Philip Gibbs should take down Fleet Street with him one fine day, with the idea of presenting him to the young gentlemen who weep and have hysterics when a newspaper happens to put up the shutters. Very few, I imagine, of the invertebrate Press gang of the period will be writing saleable novels at seventy!

Henry Pottinger Stephens, another of *Vanity's* regular contributors, I first met at the office of the publisher. We were both there on the same errand, I believe, stalking an oof bird. Stephens had just returned from Paris, where he had been acting as one of the correspondents of the *Times*. He also was to be my associate in other papers, my companion in other adventures. To these I may recur in another chapter.

At what date it was I forget, but in the early eighties Bowles sold the paper to Arthur Evans. The price was, I think, £20,000. With this Bowles started the *Lady*, which, if not perhaps quite his own line of country, promised a bigger income than would ever be obtainable from his original venture. Under the new régime I continued to contribute. The proprietor confined his attention to the City article. The literary part of the paper was under Mr. Oliver Fry. From the time of the founding of *Vanity Fair* until its purchase half a dozen years ago by the Harmsworths—a period of, say, forty years—it had but two editors. Thus, the traditions of the paper were regarded, its tone and policy were continuous, and it retained in consequence its old subscribers and its old advertisers. An editorial chair held in forty years by two editors in succession marks a record. There were several editors during the Harmsworth epoch. But the new atmosphere did not seem to suit the old growth. It was sold again. The cartoons have always been the mainstay and chief attraction of *Vanity Fair*. When dear old Pellegrini died, Bowles had discovered an accomplished successor in "Spy." Over this name Mr. Leslie Ward drew almost continuously for the paper for many years. Indeed, his work has appeared there up to a comparatively recent date.

When Edmund Yates founded the *World*, a departure in Society journalism was made. The new candidate for popular favour was to depend on its writing alone for its success. Yates had no misgivings about the propriety of engaging a staff. Bowles always held himself aloof from, and socially superior to, the Fleet Street man. Yates had been a Fleet Street man himself, and was unlikely to make

that mistake. He liked to meet his contributors socially. He was at one with them. And they had an immense liking for their chief. For, although Yates was as savage as a Mohawk when he "went for" his enemies, he was devoted to his friends. Not infrequently, in the journalistic world, you will come upon soft-hearted sayers of hard-hearted things. Yates was a man of that sort. Warm in his friendships, genial in his manner, sympathetic to the tyro, he was out for scalps the moment he scented a hint of offence—it mattered not whether the offence was intended for him or for one of his friends.

In the inception of his "Journal for Men and Women," Yates had the assistance of Henry Labouchere and Grenville Murray. And among the principal writers engaged to support the new venture were Bernard Becker, Henry Pearse, Dutton Cook, and Christie Murray. A. M. Broadley did not join till later on, I think; though when he did join he proved himself extremely useful in picking up those Society items upon which the *World* depended very much in the effort to prove acceptable to the "classes."

Yates liked to have about him as staff officers men of goodly presence, gentlemanly address. And he had a horror of anything soiled or slovenly in the attire of his contributors. This latter characteristic of the *World's* editor accounted for the engagement of lady journalists. It was, indeed, the paragraph of one of his women contributors that involved him in the criminal libel suit brought by Lord Lonsdale, resulting in the incarceration of Yates in Holloway—a severe punishment in respect of a stupid little paragraph, and a punishment the effects of which Yates carried with him to his dying day. There was one of the contributors who scarcely came up to the standard of physique which the editor regarded as desirable. This was Mr. (now Sir) H. W. Lucy. Yates gave that gentleman his first great chance of showing his paces as an independent descriptive reporter of proceedings in the House of Commons. Lucy's weekly contribution was entitled "Under the Clock, by one of the Hands." The title was supplied by the chief.

Lucy was a smart little fellow of tremendous industry, and always conscious of his own ability to make his way in the world. His hair, turning grey even in that far-off time, stood up like the quills of the porcupine. He always gave you the impression of a man who had suddenly waked up in a fright. And the expression that seemed his normal one was that of a gentle surprise. He became, at another stage in his successful career, associated with a little Irishman—Mr. Harry Furniss—an artist for some time connected with *Punch*. It was a very quaint sight to see the two little chaps pottering through an art gallery in search of subjects for their merciless ridicule. Furniss, red-headed and rotund of paunch, looking like a sort of duodecimo edition of a City Alderman, whispered his jokes to his companion, accompanying the witticisms with an engaging smile, Lucy accepting them with his habitual look of gentle wonder.

Yates himself wrote the neatest, most scintillating, and most readable paragraphs of any man who has ever essayed that extraordinarily difficult art. But neither the appeal to Society, nor the descriptive pictures of Parliament, nor the now sparkling and now vitriolic paragraphs of the editor, brought on that happy event which is known in the newspaper world as "turning the corner." That is the happy moment when the paper becomes increased in circulation, and advertising returns to the point at which it pays. It is always the unexpected that happens, and the contributions which raised the *World* from the commercial Slough of Despond were a remarkable series of articles on "West End Usurers," attributed to Mr. Henry Labouchere. As a matter of fact, however, the material was collected by several persons, and I understood at the time that the proofs were submitted to Sir George Lewis before they were passed for the press.

Judging from the style in which some of them were written, concerning men notoriously wealthy, their filtration through Ely Place was an entirely necessary proceeding. When the victim was unlikely to resent attack or attempt reprisals, the onset was at times very warm indeed. Poor

Hubert Jay Maurice was one of these latter. One never knew what the dapper gentleman's real name was—probably Moses. He had been known as Mr. Jay and as Mr. Maurice. And he ended his days as Mr. Didcot, a music-hall agent, having succeeded in giving his only daughter in marriage to the cadet of a noble house. The Didcot article appeared during Christmas week, and ended with the pregnant sentence: "Indeed, this young man's career has been so shameless that at this festive season of the year we will not ask our compositors to set it up in print."

The success of the *World* once secured, the circulation went up by leaps and bounds, and Mr. Labouchere, quick to appreciate the effect of his own suggestion, and willing to secure for himself the profits to be made by exhibiting and denouncing the evil that is in the world, soon determined to run a paper of his own. This was *Truth*, the third in the triad of publications that made good a claim to the title of Society journals. Labouchere went to work very carefully and systematically in founding the journal which will always be associated with his name—a journal, it should be at once admitted, which, while it did much in the way of airing personal dislikes, did much more in ridding Society of pests and parasites, of swindlers and charlatans, than any other journal of our time.

My friend Robert Williams was consulted concerning the founding of the new paper. And from him I used to hear how matters were progressing. From him, for example, I learned that Mr. Horace Voules, of the *Echo*, had accepted the position of manager to the new venture. Voules always reminded me of the description of another Mr. Vholes as described in "Bleak House." You recall the passage, perhaps? "If you want common-sense, responsibility, respectability, all united—Vholes is *the* man!" Williams was fond of telling a story of the interview between Labouchere and Voules at the time of the engagement. The story was *ben trovato*. But my own subsequent acquaintance with Mr. Voules convinced me that there was not any element of fact in it. The dialogue as reported by "Bobbos" ran thus:

LABOUCHERE: "I understand, Mr. Voules, that, in dealing

with the outside public, you are apt to be rather haughty in your manner?"

VOULES: "Indeed!"

LABOUCHERE: "Now, in your interviews with my little public, I desire that you will tone yourself down a little toward their level."

VOULES (*bridling, but dignified*): "Mr. Labouchere, 'aughty I never ham; but I 'ope I 'ave a proper pride."

I can testify personally that, when I knew him, Horace Voules was perfectly sound in the matter of his aspirates. To me, indeed, he appeared to be over-solicitous about them.

No sooner had "Labby," as he began to be called, got his venture launched, than he opened an attack on the owners of the *Daily Telegraph* in the most systematic, sustained, and unrelenting vein of personal journalism. Mr. Labouchere's memoirs, which are in hand, may perhaps relate that old story. It is no business of mine to stir up the puddle. Man of the world, politician, diplomatist, cool-headed as Labouchere had always proved himself, he here undoubtedly permitted himself to be betrayed into a series of libels on an old friend, which were in no way creditable to him. His attacks thereafter were legitimate crusades against the undetected jackals who prey on the public. And the public is considerably in his debt in respect of them. While as to his more piquant and personal libels, it must be reluctantly admitted that their appearance and the circumstances which resulted from them added considerably to the jocundity of those Fleet Street days.

There were quite a number of stories current then as illustrating the delightful insouciance of Labouchere. Here are four of them:

When he was in the diplomatic service, he was sent on a mission to St. Petersburg. Before starting he had a dispute with the Foreign Office about his expenses. F.O. had its idea of the scale; Labouchere had his. But the Office refused to reconsider its decision. Labouchere took his leave, crossed the Channel, and was, to all appearance, lost. A week after the appointed time he had not

arrived at St. Petersburg. A representative of F.O. was sent out on his trail. He was traced to Paris, and from thence to Vienna, where he was run to earth. In reply to his discoverer, he coolly said :

"The Foreign Office refused to pay me my expenses, and *I'm walking to St. Petersburg.*"

He was at one time Attaché at our Embassy in Washington. The Minister was suddenly recalled to London, and Labouchere was left in charge. On the morning following the departure of the Ambassador, one of the members of the United States Government called. "Minister in?" he inquired curtly of Labouchere. "Not in," replied Labby, lighting a cigarette. "Guess I'll call again," said the big politician. "Ah, do!" said Labouchere sweetly. An hour afterwards the same Great Man again put in an appearance. "Minister in yet?" he inquired sharply. "Not yet," answered Labouchere from behind the paper which he was reading. "Can you give me any idea when he *will* be back?" asked the important senator impatiently. "I haven't the remotest idea : *he sailed for Europe yesterday,*" was the soft answer not altogether calculated to turn away wrath.

When he stood for Northampton, Labouchere's colleague was Charles Bradlaugh, who frankly avowed his atheism to the shoemakers and other horny-handed artisans who were his supporters. Now, Labouchere, who was an old campaigner, knew that the Liberals of the constituency would not stand *two* atheists. The moment his address was circulated, the Nonconformists took fright, and, although religious topics were altogether absent from the astute candidate's pronunciamento, eager Dissent sniffed heterodoxy in every line of it. Labouchere thereupon sat down and wrote an autograph letter to every Nonconformist divine, on the register and off it, asking each of them to meet him, and for the purpose of discussing those topics which all good Liberals hold dear. He hired the biggest room in his hotel. He had a line of chairs drawn up in uncompromising rows along the two principal side-walls. At the end of the room was a table with a tumbler

and a carafe of water. Lying promiscuously around were copies of the *Daily News* and the *Christian World*. The invited ministers turned up to a man. The candidate's agent met them and conducted them, with every demonstration of respect, to the seats allotted to them. When Labouchere, waiting in an ante-chamber, was informed that they were all come, he entered the room. He bowed right and left, a sad smile on his lips, a black suit enveloping his person, and a general air of Chadband emanating from all parts of him. He took his place behind the table, poured out a tumbler of water, drank it down with all the gusto of one who thoroughly enjoyed it, and forthwith addressed his sad audience.

"My reverend friends," he began, "I have invited you to meet me in order that we may interchange views on those topics which are of first-class importance to Liberals, and more especially to Liberals attached to the great, influential Nonconforming bodies. But before proceeding to the consideration of mere worldly matters, I shall ask the Reverend Mr. So-and-So to engage in a few words of prayer, beseeching the Lord's blessing on our deliberations."

That did the trick for him at Northampton.

"That gentleman an atheist!" said the Reverend Mr. So-and-So to a friend as they left the hotel. "He's the first political candidate I ever knew to ask the Divine guidance in his campaign. He shall have my vote and my—er—little influence."

Those who know anything about the depth of Labouchere's religious feelings and the extent of his personal affection for Dissenters will best appreciate the humour of the situation.

When Labouchere was member for Middlesex—that was long before the Northampton days—the Lord Taunton who sat in the Upper House was his uncle. A member of the House of Commons who had mistaken the relationship addressed Labouchere one day on the Lobby.

"Ah, Labouchere," he said, "I've just been in the other House, and I heard your father deliver a most admirable address."

"I'm more than pleased to hear it," said Labby; "for my father has been dead these ten years, and until the present moment I never knew where he had got to!"

Between Labouchere on *Truth* and Yates on the *World* there commenced a species of "snacking" or sparring which promised from time to time a rush into active and bitter hostilities. The paragraphs of one paper bristled with allusions to the slips of "Edmund," and the other paper retorted racily on "Henry," and we all looked out eagerly for an outbreak of real hostility; but it never came. The doughty champions both feared and respected each other, and they expended any gall which they may have secreted during their meditations on other victims. The papers still adhere pretty nearly to the lines laid down by their founders, though lacking the personal supervision of those distinguished editors. Yates died suddenly—tragically—on leaving the stalls of a theatre, and Labouchere, abandoning both the senate and the editorial seat, retired to Florence, where he recently died. The memoirs of "Labby" should be a stimulating and piquant collection.

The complete success of the three papers about which I have been writing naturally provoked a considerable amount of the sincerest form of flattery, and imitators sprang up like mushrooms, willing to share the rewards apparently reserved for those who catered for Society. These misguided adventurers discovered too late that even a Society editor must have his aptitudes—his special qualifications. Some of the new candidates for popular favour died the death. Others of them—dumb witnesses to that hope that "springs eternal in the human breast"—never in their lives arrived at paying-point, yet exist to this day. They pass from proprietor to proprietor. No one ever hears at what price they change hands. No one ever sees a copy sold on a stall. There is no trace of their existence in the clubs. Now and then one comes upon a back number in the coffee-room of an hotel. They are the pathetic derelicts of the Press—the pariahs of journalism. They persist by reason of their absolute badness. Their

persistence recalls the inference set forth in the lines of Henry S. Leigh's verses about Uncle John :

" If Uncle John goes living on,
How wicked Uncle John must be !"

It is amusing to note how proprietors, editors, and contributors, will differ as to the motive power which has given the first substantial rise in circulation. Voules always held—he has told me so a dozen times—that the success of *Truth* was brought about by the fashion articles of "Madge." And Lucy of the *World* became possessed by the belief that the popularity of the Yates venture was partly due to the appearance therein of his articles from the gallery of the House of Commons. He determined to establish a paper on the lines laid down by Yates. And his leading article was to be his own series, entitled "Under the Clock, by One of the Hands."

Lucy selected *Mayfair* as the name of the venture on which he was about to embark. There should be no mistake about his *title* to rank as a Society journalist. In that matter he could ruffle it with the best of them. He was, however, beset with difficulties from the beginning. In the first place—to his immense surprise and disgust—he found that Yates entirely declined to abandon his right in the heading of the Parliamentary articles, which continued to appear, from another "Hand," until long after the death and burial of Lucy's bantling.

Lucy found certain members of the staff of *Mayfair* intractable ; the intractable aids declared that they found things impossible. And no one was greatly surprised when the new purveyor of social wares put the shutters up. Incidentally, Mr. Lucy's paper was the means of enriching that harvest of English literature which is garnered by Mudie. It led to the publication of a couple of novels. In one of these works Mr. Lucy drew a character which was instantly recognized as a portrait of Mr. Christie Murray. Murray had been one of the intractables on the strength of the *Mayfair*. Christie was not only impatient of attack, but he was very well equipped for hitting back, which in due course he proceeded to do. Anyone interested in the

literary amenities of the jocund days may find some diversion in referring to Christie Murray's "The Way of the World." Such merry jousts are inadmissible in these less strenuous times.

A much longer period of existence was granted to the *St. Stephen's Review*, founded by Mr. William Alison. In the editorial scheme, this organ was to play Parliamentary measures—so to speak—in addition to its piping for Society. Its political cartoons by Tom Merry did good service on more than one electoral campaign. Alison was a member of the Junior Carlton Club, so that it is needless to indicate the policy for which his paper stood. Alison had chosen for his sub-editor one of the strangest of the strange persons who crowd the journalistic mart. His name was William Tasker. He wrote vapid verses and slushy prose by the ream, over the name of "Edgar Lee." But if his literary output was of a middling sort, his lying was first-rate. He had become so much the servant of the habit that he often believed his own stories. Alison never contradicted him, and so the faculty increased, and the facility acquired by the little professor became quite marvellous. He was an extremely ill-dressed man, and grew the mutton-chop face fungi for which Frank Richardson affects such a distaste. He always wore a red tie, and it was always a soiled one. A bland, propitiatory smile played about the corners of his mouth. He would rush up to one in the Strand with this sort of news: "I've just been to Downing Street, and Disraeli told me—this is quite private, mind you—that he'll go to the country in June." The reply might be: "Hang it all! I've just left the House of Commons. Dizzy is on his feet, and has been for the last three-quarters of an hour." But that sort of facer never disturbed Tasker. He would shake his head and smile a deprecatory smile, as he answered: "Optical illusion, my dear fellow. I tell you I've just left him in Downing Street. I mentioned your name to him, and he said: 'Sound man that; give him my regards.' And I said I would, and so I have." I have heard him tell, with every detail, of his sprinting prowess. He could not run fifty yards. And he would

descant on his success on the race-course, who did not know the meaning of a handicap. He survived for some years the passing of the journal with which he was associated. These he devoted to palmistry, astrology, and other wizard sciences, the profession of which, to a scientist knowing how to advertise—and where—may, even in these advanced days, yield a living of sorts.

But the surpassing claim of the *St. Stephen's Review* to the respectful regard of posterity is the fact that it introduced Phil May to the British public. A Bohemian of Bohemians was Phil May when he was discovered, and a Bohemian of Bohemians he continued to the end—the all too early end. When he began to contribute to Alison's paper, he was engaged in designing dresses for Alias the costumier. Alias had some funny stories about the difficulty he experienced in keeping Phil at his work. One day he arrived at the office having come through a heavy shower of rain. His boots, coat, and hat, were soaked. The humane little employer fussed about, induced him to remove his boots and coat, and provided him with slippers and a studio jacket. "I shall 'ave them dried," he explained as he hurried off. The dear little chap, however, locked them up, assured that Phil May would not venture abroad without his boots and coat and hat. The hour was eleven of the forenoon. The programme of Alias was to hurry off, see his customers at one or two theatres, and return about one o'clock and take Phil—who he hoped would then have made several good designs—out to lunch. Passing Romano's, he thought he would turn in and take a liqueur of brandy. He entered. There were shouts of laughter at the end of the bar. In the midst of an admiring crowd of "the boys" stood Phil May, fully attired in the costumier's stock. He wore red Hessian boots to beyond his knees. On his head was the shako of a gendarme, and his slim figure was enveloped in a brigand cloak built for a big man. Of course the designs of the dresses had not been touched.

"I came here to see if they had got my boots," Phil explained to the exasperated costumier. "Will you take anything?"

"I will take You!" replied the little man, leading his designer into the Strand, where they were followed to the shop by a delighted crowd of urchins, who were divided in opinion as to whether the thin gentleman in costume was "Awthur Roberts" or "'Enery Hirving."

When Phil had "come into his own," when he was the favourite artist on *Punch*—favourite of the public, that is to say—he continued in the Bohemian courses which he had acquired in the lean and struggling years. At one time he was ordered horse exercise; and when he got the horse, it was thought, by the authorities at home, that it would be an excellent idea for Phil if he went into Fleet Street on horseback when business took him that way. This, it was thought, would insure his safe and early return to the domestic hearth. It answered well—for a bit. But one afternoon Phil was riding home from Fleet Street to his house in Kensington, and, in passing through Leicester Square, thought that he would drop in at the "Cosy Club," a small club then recently founded. He gave his horse in charge of an urchin to hold for him. It was then four in the afternoon. At two o'clock in the morning a police constable entered the club to inquire whether one of the members had left a horse in charge of a boy outside. The secretary remembered that May was the proud possessor of a steed. But May had left the club at midnight. He had forgotten all about his horse, and had driven home in a hansom.

Of the making of penny Society papers there was no end. But of those papers themselves there was generally an early end, and of these one may more conveniently treat in the chapter "De Mortuis."

CHAPTER VI

A GAY SCIENCE

To anyone born with a taste for the theatre, a *flair* for the public demand in stage entertainment, and a desire for the society of actors and actresses, the position of dramatic critic on a London newspaper should be one of the most coveted berths on the ship. The opportunity of heralding a good play or of "slating" a bad one secures a true moment of satisfaction. Moreover, the occupation, notwithstanding the late hours, hot theatres, and liability to corporal punishment, involved, is one of the most healthy undertakings in the gift of the Press. A continuous pursuit of this gay science insures longevity. The dramatic critic is the most long-lived man in the profession. Some of the dramatic critics whom I knew in the early eighties and late seventies are still "hard at it," I am pleased to hear. I imagine that the dramatic critic never dies. Like the majority of the plays upon which he passes judgment, he is translated or adapted.

John Oxenford, of the *Times*, was the doyen of the dramatic critics of my day. It was John's proudest boast that he never wrote a word in the *Thunderer* that could do professional damage to an actor, or take the bread out of the mouth of an actress. An amiable sentiment, truly, but scarcely indicative of the critical attitude of a writer conscientiously performing his duty to the public, his employers—ay, and to the stage itself. Often after our Saturday dinner at the Junior Garrick Club, an association which I joined some time after my regular engagement as taster of new plays, I have heard the venerable man

make this boast in a post-prandial speech. As the great majority of his hearers were actors, managers, and dramatic authors, the sentiment was invariably received with abundant applause.

Oxenford suffered for years from a chronic cough, which always announced his arrival at a theatre, and usually punctuated the performance throughout the night. Whether it was on account of this distressing affliction, or because he represented the leading journal, I do not know, but a box was always put at Mr. Oxenford's disposition on the first night of a new play. Two determined "dead-heads" generally turned up sooner or later in the great man's box. These were the late Lord Alfred Paget and John Murphy of Somerset House. The friendship between these three men, so different in station and in intellectual capacity, was exposed in a theatrical organ of the period, and in an article called "Dead-heads: Cornelius Nepos O'Mulligan." O'Mulligan was evidently intended for Murphy. He was therein described as Oxenford's toady, and his mission was indicated as being that of a diplomatic mediator who would persuade Oxenford to give a line of notice to some good-looking young woman on the stage in whom his lordship happened to take a passing interest. It was further suggested that Lord Alfred's solicitude for the ambitious artist whom he wished to befriend was not altogether personal. Lord Alfred, it was said, was simply interesting himself in furtherance of the wishes of a third party—a Very Great Personage. That I do not believe. But what I do believe is that Oxenford was innocent of sinister designs on the part of his friends, and that when a kindly word appeared in the *Times* regarding the performance of some third-rate actress, enacting a fourth-rate part, the record testified to the possession of a kindly disposition and a congenital incapacity for saying "No."

Murphy and Lord Alfred were both members of the Junior Garrick Club, and when the article to which I have alluded came out, Murphy consulted me as to what course he should take. Murphy had the baldest expanse of head I have ever seen—quite a continent it was. And it was

surrounded by a fringe of red hair. He was clean-shaven, had a most bewitching squint, and a Cork accent of peculiar enormity.

"It's not for meself I keer," said John to me, with tears in his voice, "but Alfrid's takin' it to hear-r-r-t. He niver slep' a wink since th' attack on um come out. Now wh-h-at *had* we bettther do?"

"I have no doubt that you and Lord Alfred will live it down," I told him.

"Sure it's what I'm afther tellin' Alfrid meself. 'Take no notice of um at all,' says I. O'ny Alfrid wanted your opinion as well. He thinks sich a lot of your common-sinse, bedad."

"Lord Alfred doesn't suppose, by any chance, that *I* wrote the thing?" I asked.

"Alfrid would as soon think of suspectin' Jan Axenford himself," said Murphy. But he hesitated before he said it; his squint became more pronounced, and there was such a general air of confusion on his beaming and rubicund countenance that I was convinced that both the wily conspirators had attributed the essay to me, and that John had simply been "told off" by his noble friend to lure me into an admission.

Burlesque was still a leading card at the Gaiety, and one or two other "burlesque houses," as they were called, though opera-bouffe was gradually superseding the old home-made article, with its pitiful puns and sawdust buffooneries. And the chorus engaged for these entertainments consisted of handsome girls possessing limbs suitable for exhibition in pink or yellow or violet tights. Murphy and Paget were constant visitors at these theatres. And his lordship would frequently present to some shapely ornament of the chorus a gold bangle as a token of his regards, and as an earnest of his desire for her success in the profession she had adopted. Some attempt on the part of a necessitous chorus girl to pawn one of his lordship's bangles led to the discovery that the ornaments were of little value. And it eventually transpired that they had been purchased by the gross from a Jew dealer in Hounds-

ditch. His lordship always posed among Bohemians as a poor man, and managers, therefore, thought it nothing that he should accept free admission to the playhouses. There was some searching of spirit among them when the aristocratic dead-head's will was proved. He "cut up" for quite a lot of money. And when he died, John Murphy soon followed—of a broken heart, they said, and having nothing more to live for. So passed this *par nobile fratum*!

William Holland at one time "ran" the Surrey Theatre, with pantomime in the winter, and melodrama during the remainder of the year. I attended the Surrey during his occupancy, to notice a new piece by poor Henry Pettitt. Oxenford had a box as usual. And not only was his sneezing rather more distressing than usual, but he was accompanied by a lady whose babble was incessant. This acquaintance of the venerable critic was a person of no very exalted rank in Society, and Holland became anxious lest the sternutation and conversation in the box should interfere with the comfort of those in its immediate vicinity. During the second *entr'acte* he thought it well to pay his court to the eminent exponent of the higher criticism. He knocked at the door of the box, was bidden to enter, went in, and, greeting the occupants with his characteristic effusion, inquired:

"And what do you think of the play, Mr. Oxenford?"

"The play?" said the old gentleman. "Oh, the play is rot! . . . What do *you* think of it, my dear?"

"Rot?" exclaimed the lady friend thus addressed—"it's muck!"

Only the word the fair creature employed was much coarser than "muck," and the anxious manager went away sorrowing. However, an excellent notice of the melodrama subsequently appeared in the leading journal. It may interest a new generation of those who illustrate the gay science to learn that all the theatrical representative of the *Times* received for his services was one hundred pounds a year. At least, so Mr. Oxenford himself more than once assured me.

When Mowbray Morris succeeded Oxenford as the re-

presentative of the *Thunderer*, a very different spirit informed those columns of the *Times* devoted to the stage. Morris came to the task impressed with the idea that it was the business of a critic to criticize. "Have at you!" was evidently his motto. And he laid about him right merrily, not particular whom he might inconvenience by his shrewd thrusts; for, indeed, he was no respecter of persons, and was suspected of entertaining an invincible contempt for the personnel of the British stage. When Morris was appointed, Henry Irving was in the first flush of his triumph as manager of the Lyceum Theatre. And the shrewd actor-manager had inaugurated the custom of giving a reception to his friends on the first night of a new play.

The reception was held on the stage itself after the conclusion of the performance. Very agreeable, and even memorable, functions they were. The stage had been quickly transformed into a palatial hall, made comfortable by a judicious arrangement of curtains and palms, and—as at that advanced period of the night guests were usually in need of sustenance—tables were laid out laden with cold viands in profusion. And there was plenty to drink. Now, the attitude of Morris towards the stage was that of a person who did not accept the existence of the actor as a social fact, and he resented this surely innocent effort on the part of Irving to gratify his friends. It would all have been very well had the new critic kept his opinions on this head to himself. Unfortunately, he gave them to the readers of his journal. He attributed sinister motives to the founder of the feast, and boldly averred that it was an attempt to influence the Press with "chicken and champagne." The phrase "chicken and champagne" in this connection persisted for a long time—for a much longer time than Mowbray Morris continued in his post. From the beginning of his managerial career it had been Irving's great aim to consolidate friendly relations with the London and provincial newspapers. And the fearless and unconventional satirist of "chicken and champagne" gave the popular manager of the Lyceum furiously to think.

May I here, in justice to the present policy of the *Times*

in the control of its dramatic columns, acknowledge the fact that the gentleman who at present represents that journal at the theatres more nearly approaches the ideal of what a dramatic critic ought to be than any of the men who were my contemporaries, and that he is head and shoulders above any of his own contemporaries? It is pleasant to be able to say this of any department of a Press which exhibits many of the symptoms of decadence. Mr. Walkley's attitude regarding stage affairs is nicely calculated. He is beautifully poised. He never condescends to a contemptuous pose. On the other hand, he is never inclined to accept the dramatic art too seriously. He states his opinions with playfulness and not with brutality. He exhibits a fine spirit of detachment. He never insults the professors of the art. On the other hand, he declines to take those gentlemen as seriously as they take themselves. Under all that he writes may be discovered the social philosopher. His essays are scholarly without pedantry, lively without vulgarity, piquant without mordacity, and they always afford the most stimulating "reading."

My mention above of Henry Pettitt reminds me of another writer of melodrama whom we, of the jocund years, were sometimes called upon to review. This was Paul Merrit. Paul was an enormously fat man with the absolutely hairless face of a boy. He had a high falsetto voice, and his blood-and-thunder dramas were crude, lurid, penny-plain-and-twopence-coloured productions. He had a great facility in plots and situations, and, in respect of these gifts and graces, was called in by Sir Augustus Harris to collaborate in one or two of the autumn melodramas at Drury Lane. Paul was the last man in all Europe to whom would apply the term "literary." Yet he became a member of one or two literary clubs. On the day on which the death of Thomas Carlyle was announced, some of us were sitting in one of these institutions discussing the passing of the Sage of Chelsea. To us entered Paul Merrit. He wore the drawn and despairing expression of one who had suffered a severe personal bereavement. He had in his hand a journal containing a long obituary notice of Carlyle. Holding

it towards us, he said in his high falsetto, shaken by a queer tremolo of emotion :

" Well, gentlemen, *another gap in our ranks !*"

The notion was too farcical. The claim of Merrit to a fellowship with Carlyle dispelled the cloud that the intelligence of the death of the author of the "*Sartor Resartus*" had superinduced. And, to the great surprise and disgust of poor Paul, we all burst into an uncontrollable roar of laughter. Merrit eventually abandoned writing and took to farming. In that occupation, I understand, he discovered his *métier*.

I mentioned a little while back that the business of dramatic criticism is conducive of longevity. When I first went professionally to the theatre stalls in 1870, until I gave up that healthy practice in 1890, I saw on first night after first night the same faces. They never appeared to be ill or tired. They never sent substitutes on important *premiers*. They never appeared to grow any older from year to year.

There was Joseph Knight, for example. He was occupying the critic's stall long before I ever saw the inside of a London theatre, and he continued to occupy it—with credit to himself, and to the great satisfaction of the performers—for years after my connection with the Press had ceased. He was a fine, burly, broad-shouldered man. Hailed from Yorkshire, I think, and with his bronzed face, brown beard, genial smile, and keen eye, presented more the appearance of a retired officer of the mercantile marine than of a haunter of the auditorium, and a man who usually got up in the afternoon, and came home with the milk in the morning. He had a hearty way with him, and talked in a torrent that seemed to rush over pebbles. " Willie " Wilde used to give a wonderfully realistic imitation of Jo Knight, which the subject overhearing in the foyer of the Avenue Theatre one night gravely resented. But the two men " made it up," and Knight, indeed, became so friendly with his imitator that on one occasion he asked him to write his weekly article in the *Athenæum* for him. Willie readily consented ; and when the article in due course appeared, it turned out to be

a really remarkable travesty of dear Jo's somewhat turgid and oracular style. The essay gave great delight to those who were in the secret. But Knight never saw the joke—I question whether he ever saw any joke—and expressed to Wilde his gratitude for the admirable manner in which he had filled his place.

Once and only once did I see the "Knight Owl" in a rage. Joseph was a sort of pluralist in dramatic-critical benefices, representing at one time three or four daily and weekly publications. This fact came to the knowledge of the very young critic of a very young weekly paper, who thought that he saw his way to a pungent personal paragraph. The paragraph duly made its appearance, and Knight was severely taken to task because he was in the habit of writing about the same performance in several newspapers. The young critic put it at half a dozen, which was overshooting the mark by at least two. At the very next first night of a new play, Knight and his small accuser were in their stalls before the rising of the curtain. Knight, perceiving his prey from afar off, made toward him and, assuming a very threatening attitude, said :

"What you wrote about me in your infernal paper is—
A LIE !"

The youthful criticaster adjusted his monocle, produced a notebook and pencil, and, with the well-bred suavity of a man dying to oblige his accuser, inquired, "How many of it is a—er—lie?" and prepared to take down the correction for use in a future issue. But the torrent of Knight's speech tumbled unintelligible over the pebbles, and he returned to his own stall snorting defiance.

Moy Thomas was an excellent judge of what a play ought to be, and understood also the sort of treatment best suited to the public for whom he wrote. For many years he wrote the dramatic notices for the *Daily News*. In those far-off days it had a literary staff, the character of which was not second to that of any morning journal. Thomas's articles were remarkable for their admirable lucidity, sound judgment, and polished literary style. He also provided the dramatic notices for the *Graphic*.

"Willie" Wilde, whom I have just mentioned in connection with the burly Joseph Knight, was a determined first-nighter. He was an exceedingly talkative man, and he talked so very well that one did not care to stop his agreeable chatter even when it was inconveniently out of place. One evening I happened to occupy a stall next to that of a then well-known gentleman of the Jewish persuasion who commenced in Fleet Street as an advertising canvasser, and subsequently blossomed into a newspaper proprietor, although the newspaper in question was, to quote the immortal excuse of the wet-nurse in "Mr. Midshipman Easy," "a very little one." I imagine he has done well, for the last time I saw him he was lolling back in a victoria, and driving down Portland Place with the air of a man who owned all the houses on both sides. On the occasion to which I allude, he had not as yet arrived at the victoria stage. Indeed, he had been released from gaol that very morning. He had been remanded in custody on a charge of a commercial kind; but being now out on bail, and having none of that supersensitiveness which would characterize a Gentile similarly situated, he celebrated his release by taking his wife to the theatre. Wilde was sitting immediately behind the pair, and next to William Mackay, to whom, as the play proceeded, he indulged in a series of humorous commentaries. Our hero, being very intent on the play—an opera-bouffe—became at last annoyed by the chatter behind him, and, turning round to Mackay, who had not uttered a word, said in a voice audible all over the place:

"I wish, sir, you'd make less noise."

Mackay, conscious of innocence and deeply resentful, turned to Wilde, and observed audibly, with a touch of malice which was seldom absent from his impromptus:

"Do keep quiet, Willie; you are annoying the occupant of the *adjoining cell*."

A London edition of the *New York Herald* was published in the Strand at the time when this little incident happened, and next morning the critic of that journal, under the head of "An Incident," tacked the story on to his dramatic

notice—names and all. He added the comment : “ A word in season, how good it is ! ”

Wilde and his friend, who were both Irishmen, and had at various periods written the dramatic notices for *Vanity Fair*, represented the new school of criticism. They took neither themselves nor the dramatic art seriously. Accepting the dictum of their fellow-countryman, Sheridan, as to the purpose of the theatre and the limitations of dramatic art, their articles were irreverent, audacious, a little contemptuous. *Vanity Fair* encouraged this attitude towards players and playhouses. And, indeed, it was the natural and inevitable result of the seriousness with which the critics of the period were beginning to take both themselves and the theatre. The proprietors of the *Daily Telegraph* were greatly interested in theatrical affairs. Mr. Edward Lawson, now Lord Burnham, was the son-in-law of Mr. Ben Webster, of the Adelphi Theatre ; and that paper led the way in devoting a considerable space to theatrical matters. “ Epoch-making ” became quite the appropriate phrase to employ regarding any new production which was unusually well received. Clement Scott, the critic of the *Daily Telegraph*, was an instrument ready to the hand of his employers. His standard of all dramatic work appeared to be the Robertson comedies as staged by the Bancrofts—just as in later years Mr. William Archer found nothing very good after “ The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.” That forgotten comedy was Mr. Archer’s “ epoch-making play.”

Both Mr. Archer and Clement Scott had served an apprenticeship on the *London Figaro*, and surely no two members of a staff were ever before so unequally yoked together. Scott was impulsive, always in extremes of heat or cold, and never very particular as to the accuracy of his phrases. Archer was a “ dour body,” solid in matter, turgid and dogmatic in manner, and as solemn in statement as a Presbyterian meenister. The atmosphere of seriousness by which Mr. Archer has surrounded himself when dealing with playhouses is, indeed, impenetrable, fuliginous.

Perhaps, all being said and done, the proper attitude of the man retained for this sort of work is neither that of

satirical sceptic and scintillating detractor, nor that of fanatical worshipper and solemn commentator. Ernest Bendall, in my time, struck, I think, the golden mean. He was never betrayed into excessive praise or excessive censure. He found nothing in the theatre to make such a demand on the emotions as should call for literary heroics. Yet his judgments were sound, and they carried weight. He was temperate in expression, had a natural facility for hitting on the right word, and he always wrote like a gentleman. Bendall may have had contemporaries who wrote more brilliantly, but none who wrote with a nicer sense of his duty to the public, and with less desire to parade his own idiosyncrasies. A more admirable selection for the office of Censor under the Lord Chamberlain could not have been made.

Nesbit was another of the serious exponents of the art of dramatic criticism. He followed Morris on the *Times*, but whether he was his immediate successor, or whether some other contributor intervened, I do not recollect. I have never kept a diary, and I have never preserved a letter written to me. And I would embrace this opportunity of advising any young journalist who may happen to read these recollections to make a point of writing up his diary, and of filing letters possessing any literary value. Had I made a practice of diarizing, my present task would be very considerably lightened ; and if I had kept my letters from contemporaries, I should by now have had a very fine collection of autographs upon which to draw for the entertainment of my readers. Nesbit wrote well, but he wrote too much. The marvel to me about his work always was, that, accomplishing so tremendous an output, he was able to keep his supply in bulk up to his sample. But Nesbit was dull—and that's a fact. He and Archer approached the task of reporting a play much in the attitude of a Judge taking his seat to try a man for murder.

But there was a third class of reviewer. He adopted neither the solemn mood affected by Ibsenites and Irvingites, nor the detached and playful attitude of those who perpetuated Sheridan's sane assignment of the position of the

stage. James Davis was a fair representative of this third class. "Jimmy" delighted in setting the mummers by the ears. He attacked without scruple and without mercy. He had all the audacity of the free-lance, with all the love of mischief which characterizes the schoolboy. And yet "Jimmy" was one of the best-natured little fellows in the world. But he revelled in what the Germans call mischief-joy. And when you put a pen into his hand, it ran to libel as surely as the needle turns to the pole. He owned at various times the *Cuckoo*, originally started by Edmund Yates. He founded the *Bat*—wherein he fell foul of the whole theatrical hierarchy—and near the end he established a weekly organ called the *Phoenix*, which lacked somewhat of his old dash and vim. A member of the Jewish community, he was wanting in one of the racial characteristics. He cared nothing for money—as money. He married money, and he made money, and all the time he was flinging money about with both hands. It is strange to remember that, notwithstanding his early and persistent attacks on the stage and its professors, he eventually became a popular writer of musical comedy, and during this period he made thousands of pounds, and was the means of giving employment to hundreds of the performers whom he affected to hate. James was a most cheery companion, a finished gourmet, a lavish and agreeable host, a determined gambler, and a rattling good little chap. He went through several fortunes, died worth nothing, and he was the best bridge-player of his day.

The serene atmosphere in which the critic of plays dwelt was seldom disturbed by storms. Tempest did occur, however, to the intense delight of the newspaper-reading world, and to the great scandal of the more serious supporters of the British drama. Thus, Henry Irving found it advisable to take criminal proceedings against a paper for a perfectly harmless and very humorous skit written by Mr. G. R. Sims. Never, surely, in the history of the theatre was so much cry made over such a contemptible quantity of wool. But we were just beginning to stand on our dignity, you see, and the Lyceum manager stood for all

that was respectable and traditional. Never, perhaps, had the suburbs been so moved as on that occasion. And had Mr. Sims been tried by a jury drawn from the fastnesses of Brixton, Clapham, and the Camden Road, he would have had but a short shrift. Happily for all concerned, the matter was amicably settled in court. It ended like a French duel—shots were exchanged, but nobody was hurt.

A more serious forensic encounter took place in the Court of Common Pleas. I had not at that time commenced business on the Press as a regular writer about plays; but I was enormously interested in all that concerned the drama, and I attended the trial concerning which I shall say a word or two. The case was called "*Fairlie v. Blenkinsop*." It came on for hearing before Mr. Justice Keating in the Court of Common Pleas in Westminster Hall. Fairlie was the lessee and manager of the St. James's Theatre.

Mr. Fairlie's manager—"producer" he would be termed in these fastidious days—was Richard Mansell. Mansell was an Irishman whose real name was Maitland, and he had been the first to introduce opera-bouffe, with English words, to a London audience. With very little money, but with unbounded pluck, he took the Lyceum Theatre, and produced "*Chilperic*" and "*Le Petit Faust*," bringing Hervé over from Paris to conduct the orchestra. The thing was a great success, but Dick Mansell had about as much notion of theatrical finance as had his great London predecessor, Dick Sheridan. The money flowed quickly into the treasury, but it flowed out in even greater volume. The system of accounts was lax, and Mansell, who should never have looked back after that successful venture, did nothing *but* look back for the rest of his life. He died a short time since after a long and painful illness. But to the last he was the hopeful, hearty, handsome Irishman whom I had met for the first time on the day that the disaster at Sedan was reported in the papers.

The management opened their theatre with an opera-bouffe entitled "*Vert Vert*," translated from the French by Henry Herman, who afterwards made a reputation for himself as the author of "*The Silver King*." The attack

made on the opera by *Vanity Fair* was fierce, scathing, unsparing. The writer was especially nasty about the ladies of the chorus, whom he said could neither act, sing, nor dance, but who, he supposed, were exhibited before the public because "there are some rich young men about town, and several old ones, who devote their time and energies to the discovery and encouragement of dramatic talent in good-looking young women." That was the gravamen of the charge—that and an allusion to a dance called the "Riperelle." Serjeant Ballantine was for the plaintiff, and Mr. John Day (afterwards Mr. Justice Day) was for the defendant.

The interest of the occasion centred greatly in the cross-examination of Mr. Thomas Gibson Bowles, subsequently the representative of King's Lynn, and the beloved "Tommy" of the House of Commons. Ballantine, of course, could see nothing wrong in anything theatrical, and contrived by maladroit questions to let "Tommy" get in some answers which Day dare not have elicited in chief. In particular he made the mistake of cross-examining him about the "Riperelle." "It is the cancan in its essential part," explained Bowles. Ballantine, rushing on his fate, pressed the witness. "Tell us," he thundered, "in what the indecency of the dance consists." Stroking his blonde cavalry moustache, and smiling pleasantly, Bowles replied, with great distinctiveness and amid a dead silence: "The 'Riperelle' is an illustration by gesture of the act of——" But the conclusion of the sentence is scarcely of a kind to be repeated here. It won the case. The jury found for the defendant without leaving the box. Mr. Fairlie soon after his theatrical experiences resumed his proper name of Philips, read for the Bar, was called, and in 1890 I happened to be with him in settling a case of newspaper libel in which he was engaged for the plaintiff. Mr. F. C. Philips has furthermore made a reputation for himself as a writer of excellent fiction. His "As in a Looking-Glass" has gone through many editions, and is to this day, I understand, "asked for" at Mudie's.

That sort of criticism, however, is no longer in vogue,

which for some reasons, I think, is rather a pity. And one of them is that theatre-goers have ceased to accept dramatic criticisms as being in any way a guide to the theatre. Bad plays are so frequently treated with respectful notices, and the public reading the criticisms have been so frequently deceived, that this department of a newspaper's literary contents has become negligible. The most frank and most business-like method would be to drop all pretence at criticism, and simply "report" each new play. It will come to that.

A well-known barrister who wrote criticisms on plays was Sir Douglas Straight. He had not then received the honour of knighthood. He was the inseparable companion of Montagu Williams, represented the licensed victuallers in the House of Commons, and wrote his dramatic criticisms in the *Sporting Times*.

It would be impossible to give a complete list of the dramatic critics who exercised their craft during the couple of decades that comprise my experience of the front of the house. But as a suitable conclusion to this chapter on a gay art I shall endeavour to call up the appearance of the approaches and auditorium of a leading theatre on the production of an important work. In an attempt to visualize the scene, some figures will present themselves that, without this aid to memory, might—to my lasting regret—be overlooked. I shall not attempt to recall any particular play. But I shall select what I shall suppose to be a typical first night at the Lyceum Theatre at the beginning of the eighties. One proceeds along the Strand leisurely and in chastened mood. The tail of the pittites is struggling out of the covered passage that leads to the pit entrance. That passage, by the way, had been nicknamed by a witty policeman the "Cowshed," in honour of certain elderly ladies who used to pervade that part of the Strand, and who were accustomed to take shelter in this recess. Turning out of the Strand into Wellington Street, one sees the long line of cabs and carriages discharging their occupants between the classic pillars which stand before the Lyceum portico. There are as yet no motors—no taxi-cabs—in

this procession. Somehow those panting vehicles would not have harmonized with the sentiments of a Lyceum audience. We cross the threshold. On the right is the box-office, and through the aperture you see the benign and reverend face of Mr. Joseph Hurst, placid, gold-spectacled, serene. The vestibule is spacious, heavily carpeted, and from it an immensely wide flight of steps, covered in soft, thick stair-carpets; leads to the back of the circle. On each side of this stairway stand little boys in Eton suits. They are infant vergers in this temple of art ; for Irving has disestablished the female programme-seller—she was perhaps a too frivolous person—and has installed these youths in clean collars and short jackets to conduct the patrons to their seats, and to see each one provided with a bill of the play. The lights are subdued. The arriving visitors do not indulge in the laughter and gay, irresponsible chatter of people entering a house of opera-bouffe. Here is more serious business, be assured. Our voices, as we advance to the foot of the stairs, are subdued, like the lights. The moving crowd has more the aspect of a congregation than of a theatrical audience.

At the top of the stairs stands a tall man in a reddish beard. He is in evening-dress, but wears no decoration of any kind. Yet he is there to receive this distinguished throng. There is a gracious bow to each as he passes, and to some an extended hand and a sedate greeting given in a rich Dublin brogue. For the gentleman in the red beard is Mr Bram Stoker, the business man, chief bottle-holder and Boswell, of the Lyceum manager. Bram is one of your genuine hero-worshippers. He abandoned a big berth under the Dublin Corporation to follow the fortunes of the Chief. He makes much of his hero's friends on the Press, and does his best to conciliate his detractors. He manages Irving's finances—as far as the manager will permit their supervision. And he writes the Chief's after-dinner speeches and his lectures on Shakespeare and the musical glasses. As he smiles on us now, he little foresees what the future holds for Irving and himself. No gloomy anticipations intrude as we pass the well-pleased priest of the vestibule.

The Irving régime is for all time, and the "wing of friendship shall never moult a feather." Alas for the futility of human foresight! Poor Bram has himself now gone to solve the great mystery.

At last we have reached our stalls—you and I—and have time to look about us. The attendant acolyte has provided us with programmes. There is a subdued air of expectancy abroad. Conversation is carried on in decorous accents. There is no laughter. Even the deep bass of Jo Knight is tempered to the occasion. The orchestra files in. Mr. Hamilton Clarke takes his place above the tune-ful choir. The popular parts of the house are crammed. The seasoned playgoers who have fought their way through the "Cowshed" to the front row of the pit point out to each other the eminent persons as they proceed to their stalls. They are not always infallible in their identification—these quidnuncs of the pit. Mr. Moy Thomas is confidently pointed out as Sir Garnet Wolseley. "Looks diff'rent in his uniform, don't he?" observes the lady recipient of the information. I have heard them point out Lennox Browne as the Duke of Argyll, Sir Francis Jeune as Lord Leighton, and Mr. Hume Williams as Mr. Walter of Printing-House Square—a gentleman rarely seen at these functions, and one whose name, one would imagine, would hardly be known to the public of the pit. These illuminating asides were always delivered with the utmost confidence. And upon one such occasion I was overjoyed to hear myself identified and accepted as Cardinal Manning—an ecclesiastic to whom the theatre was anathema, whose priests were forbidden the playhouse, although, strangely enough, they were left free to patronize the music-halls.

On these first nights at the Lyceum the occupants of the stalls and boxes the gathering is representative of various strata of Society. High finance and high philanthropy are there in the person of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, who was long and generally supposed to have financed the Lyceum. This has now been officially contradicted by the authorized biography. All I can say is, that the Baroness might have done worse with her money.

Sir George Lewis, eyeglass duly adjusted, stands surveying the house and nodding to his many acquaintances. On hearing of the death of Sir George an old friend of his spoke of him as having gone to learn "the great Secret." "They will find," said a lady, "that it is no secret from Sir George." The higher branch of the profession is represented by Sir Edward Clarke, always looking fierce, and always feeling much the reverse, his short, square figure and "Dundreary" whiskers savouring much of the "City" which he loves, and in which he began life. Frank Lockwood, towering, genial, and majestic, does not permit his natural humour to become abated even in this grave gathering. Mr. Watts-Dunton, brisk and beady-eyed, busies himself with his playbill, and makes no pretence of hearing the remarks which Mr. Percy Fitzgerald passes on to him. Clement Scott, self-conscious and upheld by a sense of the importance of the occasion—and of his own—divests himself of his fur coat, and settles himself in his stall, assuming an expression of the deepest melancholy. Edmund Yates—evidently bored by, and sceptical concerning, the pervading air of gravity—discusses mere *World-ly* matters with his accomplished critic, Dutton Cook. Oscar Wilde, seated beside his pretty wife, preserves the cynical smile which characterizes him. Joseph Hatton—one of Irving's most devoted literary henchmen—beams, like another Mr. Fezziwig, "one vast, substantial smile." Knight is accompanied by a lady of great personal attractions—of a classic beauty, one might have said. It is the accomplished pluralist's daughter. Frank Marshall, of the leonine head, looks as though he were anticipating one of the great moments of his life. And so he is. His admiration of Irving is sincere and whole-hearted. In his view Irving can do no wrong. Charles Dunphy, of the *Morning Post*, seated next to Howe, of the abhorred *Morning Advertiser*, takes a mental note of the Society persons who are present, and inquires after the health, I hope, of Howe's father. For Howe is the son of the veteran actor of that name, now a member of the Irving company, and the son is present to sit in judgment of his parent. It is—to quote a phrase of Labouchere's, in his speech to

the jury in a famous libel case—a reversal of the old Scriptural legend: “Instead of Abraham offering up Isaac, we are presented with the spectacle of Isaac offering up Abraham.”

On these first nights at the Lyceum there are a great many persons present whom one never sees on other occasions or at other theatres. If Bram Stoker had his way, they would not be sitting here and now. Mr. Stoker’s eye is ever on the main chance, and he resents the sort of dead-head out of whom you cannot get even a newspaper paragraph. But Irving has his way in all these matters, and the presence of this unproductive contingent testifies to a trait only too rare both in men and managers. Princely in his hospitalities, generous to a fault, Irving was above all capable of a lasting gratitude. These dead-heads were the recurring evidence of this sentiment. They were those who had been kind to him in early days, those who had faith in him when, as yet, the public had not accepted him. These he never forgot. And it is one of the little circumstances in his career as manager which I like most to remember. For, truth to tell, there are some of them that I would quite willingly forget.

Byron Webber, burly and black-bearded, appears rather restive under the restraint of the Lyceum auditorium. Tom Catling’s genial smile indicates that no amount of exterior depression can affect a spirit tuned to gentle enjoyment wherever two or three of his fellow-creatures are gathered together. Among the others who are constitutionally incapable of assuming the grave expression suitable to the occasion are Bendall the bland; Chance Newton, the Aristarchus *cum* Autolycus of the stalls; Burnand, beaming beatific—of *Punch*. . . . But the orchestra has ceased, and the curtain is going up.

One could not but admire Irving. He compelled admiration. But I never could enroll myself among the congregation of his worshippers. He had a magnetic and dominating personality; he was that strange portent—a gentleman of Nature’s own making; he was princely in his dealings; he was an accomplished stage-manager; his ideals were of

the highest. But, in my opinion, he was never a great actor. He most nearly approached histrionic genius when cast for a part in which his outstanding mannerisms became utilized as qualities. In parts where they could not be made characteristic of the part, they were excrescences. Thus, I have always held that the actor's best parts were Digby Grand in "Two Roses," and Mathias in "The Bells"; and his most deplorable efforts, Othello and Macbeth.

But whatever his shortcomings, he deserved better of his day and generation than to have been made the subject of Mr. Brereton's "Life."

CHAPTER VII

THE PASSING OF THE PURITAN SABBATH

IN the course of the decades of which I am writing, London became the centre of a silent, gradual, irresistible, and altogether welcome revolution. It witnessed the passing away of the Puritan Sabbath and the evolution of the Rational Sunday. So quietly did the change evolve itself that no man could mark the hour or the year of its completion. But the historian of the passing moment, the working journalist of the period affected, had at all events a unique opportunity of noting the events which led to our gradual emergence from the national gloom generated in these islands more than three centuries ago.

London in the sixties and early seventies was the saddest and most gloomy capital in Europe. In the morning church bells clanged over empty streets. An expression of misery might be read on the faces of the few hurrying pedestrians. A curious silence pervaded the thoroughfares. At the hours for repairing to church or chapel, sad-faced men and women, and demure little hypocrites of boys and girls in stiff Sunday best, made dutiful marches. After church came the awful midday meal of roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, and apple tart. The afternoon was usually devoted to sleep.

The proletariat as a rule remained in bed until the public-houses opened. Crowds of soddened creatures, suffering yet from the effects of Saturday night's carousals, clustered round the doors of the gin-palaces, eager to obtain "a hair of the dog that bit them." When at last the portals did open, a clamorous congregation besieged the bars, and one beheld, perhaps, the origin of the phrase which tells of those

who do "a roaring trade." In the Seven Dials, in Clare Market, across the water in Southwark and Blackfriars, the "pub" proclaimed itself as the most popular institution in all England. It is quite impossible for the younger generation to picture the scenes that were witnessed on Sunday nights just before and just after closing hour at these houses of refreshment. At that time Great Britain might easily have boasted of being the most drunken nation in the world. As the doors of the taverns swung open to admit or to vomit forth a votary, one caught a glimpse of pictures Hogarthian in their stark and shameless debauchery. I can recall even now the gust of hot, pestilent air that issued out, and caught the throat and nose of the passing citizen; the clamorous boom of a hundred excited conversations pierced and punctuated by the shrill declamation and hysterical shriek of women—sometimes suckling their young in the mephitic miasma of a moral hell.

And who can blame them? They had no other resource. Here, at least, they might woo a temporary forgetfulness. By hereditary custom amusement was taboo for ever for them and for their children. So they slept on a Sabbath during the close time for publicans, and then they proceeded in droves to their favourite houses of call, there to make beasts of themselves. The streets of London on Sunday night, when the time arrived for the eviction of the publican's customers into the night, presented a sad spectacle. In some parts of the Metropolis the scenes enacted were a disgrace to even what small civilization existed in those regions. Brawls, assaults, free fights, licence, "language," brought to a lurid close the hours of the holy day.

Thus the proletariat. And the more favoured classes—how of them? Well, they were—or such of them as were acquainted with Fellows of the Zoological Society—at liberty to visit the Zoo! By a great many worthy persons even this educational diversion was regarded with extreme disfavour. And I have known a father of a family, a gentleman of position, a person of business aptitudes, and in the ordinary affairs of life accredited with more than his share of common-sense, refuse to permit his daughters to

make use of Fellows' tickets admitting to the Gardens on Sunday. Quite gravely—and quite honestly, I believe—he explained his action on the ground that a visit to the Zoo on Sunday was a breach of the Commandment which adjures us to “keep holy the Sabbath day.” How many fathers would adopt that course to-day? And supposing the paternal prohibition were uttered, how many daughters do you suppose would regard it? The fact that rest may also mean recreation has become an article of the Londoner's creed. The parks are now provided with excellent bands. The environs of the city are supplied with golf-links. The lawn-tennis courts of the suburbs are used on Sundays by those to whom the Sabbath is, perhaps, the only day in the week on which they can be sure of a game. In the evening there are concerts. The innocent gaiety of Society is catered for at a hundred West End restaurants and hotels. While the bike and the motor have taken roving Londoners farther afield for their well-earned seventh-day cessation from work. The Puritan Sabbath has died the death. The Rational Sunday has come to stay.

And what were the causes—immediate and remote—which have led up to this very important and desirable result? It was not effected by any systematic preaching of a propaganda. Moral and social reforms are not secured in that way. Politicians, keen to observe the tendency of public taste, sometimes attempt to run with it, and then accept the honour of having created it. Perhaps in the whole history of legislation no more delightful instance of this has been afforded than in some of the enactments of the Administration. They brought in a measure of spoliation called a Licensing Bill, and they included in their Finance Bill a crushing tax on spirits. The avowed object of both measures was declared by their authors to be to stamp out the curse of drink. Chadband himself never rose to such heights of hypocrisy, or uttered, with Puritan unction, such atrocious cant. The moment selected by Mr. Asquith and his friends for making Great Britain sober was the moment when it had become patent to the world that Great Britain had grown sober on its own account!

The efforts of the Sunday League must not be omitted in any attempt to assign their places to the influences at work in the emancipation of the English from the slavery of the Puritan Sabbath. The League came forward at what is called "the psychological moment" to supply a demand which the growing intelligence of the people had created. The first great impetus given to the rational observance of a seventh day was given by the general adoption of the bike by the youth of both sexes. This easy, safe, quick, and inexpensive mode of transit gave almost immediate pretext for revolt against the ancient domestic enactments. The call of the long white roads sounded in the ears of the boys and girls. Wider vistas opened up before them. Inaccessible places were brought near. Even the attractions of the Sunday dinner of roast beef no longer allured those who wished to be early afield. The roadster triumphed. The old restrictions were swept away like cobwebs.

Another factor in the silent revolution was the lure of the Thames. This, indeed, began to call to the jaded senses of the overworked Londoner at an earlier date than that of the invitation of the bike. In the early seventies I have sculled from Kingston up to Sunbury Lock on a Sunday afternoon without meeting more than a dozen other craft. And during those same years I have idled between Marlow Bridge and Temple Lock without encountering a skiff on the whole reach. The fatuous fisherman, indeed, attached his unwieldy punt to the ripecks stuck in the river-bed, and invented fish stories while he waited for the infrequent bite. Save for him the upper reaches were deserted. The beauties of the river discovered themselves for him and for the swans.

To-day the Thames has become the River of Pleasure. Music floats from club lawns; every reach from Richmond up to Wargrave is joyous with the laughter from skiffs and punts and launches. The locks, ever filling and emptying, give entrance and egress to as many river craft on this one day as in earlier times passed in the whole three hundred and sixty-five. There is a line of house-boats on nearly every reach, and from beneath their awnings, white or striped or apple green, there come the strumming of the banjo and

the pop of the champagne cork. On the lawns sloping from week-end houses to the stream happy groups assemble. The men in flannels, the girls in white and cream-coloured fabrics, make for the tennis-courts or for the flotilla moored to the landing-stage in which the lawn meets the river. Yes ; in any attempt to assign the causes which were instrumental in banishing the Puritan Sabbath from London, the Thames must be accorded a place of honour. The Thames first showed the Londoner the way out. And the motor car continued and extended the exodus.

It must not be supposed that the old order was permitted to yield place to new without a word of protest here and there. Among other of the many remonstrants were the Reverend and Right Reverend Fathers in God forming the Upper House of Convocation. The action of this episcopal court brings me to the point at which the Press touches the question, and renders this matter of Sunday observance germane to the general scheme of my book.

Singular as it may appear, the original factor which set the Upper House of Convocation reflecting on the matter was an article by Mr. "Jimmy" Davis in his own paper, the *Bat*. That a gentleman of the Jewish faith should have succeeded in influencing the episcopal chiefs of the English Christians may, on the first blush of it, appear strange. But it is not more strange than the other fact that some of those very Bishops owed their preferment to a Jewish Prime Minister. The whole incident of Jimmy's interposition, and its results, make an interesting story, though a long one, I am afraid. At this juncture, then, let me address you, who have followed me thus far, in the words that appear in the middle of the stodgy parts of Carlyle's "Frederick the Great" : "Courage, reader !"

While freedom was thus making for itself wider boundaries, Jimmy Davis was very much in the movement. And being in the movement, he would naturally take an interest in the Pelican Club, which was the most advanced, unconventional, and at times rowdy, protest that had so far been made against the tyranny of Mrs. Grundy. Although I was a member of the Pelican Club myself, I do not remember

whether Davis was. Nor need I take the trouble to make inquiries, as the fact does not affect my narrative. Probably he was *not*. For the institution was founded by a gentleman who had at one time been in his employ in an inferior capacity. Certainly I never met him on the premises.

The Pelican Club was founded by Mr. Ernest Wells—familiarily known as “Swears-and-Swells.” Its membership was composed chiefly of rapid men-about-town, and its principal functions were given on Sunday nights. These were concerts at which the comic element preponderated, and boxing contests conducted in a properly-appointed ring. Suitable premises were secured in Denman Street, a shy thoroughfare close to Piccadilly Circus. The place had formerly been used as the factory of a carriage-builder. The ground-floor was very spacious and very lofty, and in every way was adapted to its new purposes. There was a gallery above, off which opened card-rooms, bedrooms, and other apartments. A bar was fitted up close to the entrance, and the whole place was soon transformed into an extremely bright and cheery institution. Having secured the premises and decided on the lines on which the institution was to be run, there remained for the enterprising founder the important question of obtaining members.

Mr. Wells called in to his assistance Mr. “Willie” Goldberg. A word or two concerning that remarkable little man may not be out of place. John Corlett and Reggie Brooks were taking a walk one day in the neighbourhood of Maidstone, when they came on the encouraging spectacle of a small man sitting by the roadside, and sniggering over the front page of Corlett’s newspaper. The sight was so agreeable and flattering to the wayfarers that they stopped to inquire into the exact source of the stranger’s mirth. The conversation thus commenced ended in the engagement of the small man on the staff of the *Pink 'Un*. And it turned out to be one of the best engagements that Corlett ever made. Goldberg was a 'Varsity man, his career at Oxford having been, if not brilliant, at least much more than respectable. When he left the University, he obtained a Government appointment, which, in his own phrase, he “chucked.” When encountered

by Corlett on a Kentish highway, he was just idling along. He was a born Bohemian, and he idled along until the day of his death.

Now, when Goldberg joined Corlett's staff, the paper to which he was called upon to contribute was the favourite periodical literature of what constituted the rapid section of Society. And Goldberg not only catered, in his way, for the literary thirst of men-about-town, but he became personally identified with that contingent out of doors. The "Johnnies," the "mashers," the "rowdy-dowdy boys," the "sports," of the joyous days made much of him. Indeed, they made so much of him that he went to his grave a good quarter of a century before there was any absolute necessity for making that journey.

Here, then, was the man for Ernest Wells. Goldberg was in a position not only to introduce members, but to "boom" the enterprise in the Press. "Willie" at first showed himself coy. But the offer of a share in the concern proved an irresistible lure. An agreement was drawn up, and the Pelican Club became the joint property of Ernest Wells and William Goldberg. The latter gentleman at once set himself to the task of collecting members. And the collection which he succeeded in making as a nucleus certainly promised something in the way of clubs that the West End had yet seen. There were Major "Bob" Hope Johnstone, "Hughie" Drummond of the Stock Exchange, his brother Archie Drummond of the Scots Guards, Captain Fred Russell, "Billy" Fitzwilliam, the Marquis of Queensberry, "Kim" Mandeville (afterwards Duke of Manchester), Arthur Roberts the comedian, and the brothers Horn—not the boxers of that name, but a couple of rich young men.

From such a start the club naturally grew in numbers, and made for itself exactly the sort of reputation which the proprietors desired. Denman Street became the liveliest corner in the swagger end of London. Boxing contests on a Sunday night hit the imagination of the town. A certain general curiosity was excited. Membership, which was restricted, was eagerly sought. The shekels came rolling in. The Pelican, it was believed, had come to stay.

When the success of the new institution was at its height, "Jimmy" Davis contributed to the columns of the *Bat* an article on "The Sunday Amusements of the Rich." Of course, the whole thing was conceived in a mood of extreme cynicism, and Davis wrote the article with his tongue in his cheek. It was strange enough that Davis should write such an article. For what, after all, could it matter to a Jew how the Gentiles amused themselves on a Sunday? But it was still more strange that an article appearing in the columns of a paper which did not enjoy the very sweetest of reputations, should have vexed the righteous minds of the Episcopal Bench, and caused the subject of "Jimmy's" article to be debated in the Upper House of Convocation.

And it was strange, too—in its way—that, when the debate was set down for hearing, I, a member of the Pelican Club, should have been deputed by the editor of an evening paper to attend Convocation, and write a more or less graphic description of the historic debate. My experience of the Upper House of Convocation, while assuring me that its members possessed quite a respectable amount of debating power, also convinced me that their deliberations were academic merely, and that the Bishops were terribly out of touch with actualities. The conditions under which the "House" sat were not conducive to those illusions which the laity should cherish regarding the episcopacy. Their lordships met in a dining-room on the first-floor of a house in Dean's Yard, Westminster. A striped wall-paper was adorned at gaping intervals with engravings from Millais and Landseer. The furniture was mid-Victorian. A long telescope-table filled the middle of the room. Round this board sat the Bishops, presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who took his place at the top of the table. Had their lordships not been robed in billowing white, with lawn sleeves, doctors' hoods, and decorated with episcopal signets, the idea conveyed to the mind of the casual observer would have been that of a group of commercial travellers assembled in the commercial room of a country hotel waiting for the one o'clock ordinary.

In the embrasure of a window looking out on to Dean's

Yard a table was placed for the reporters. The general public was, of course, rigorously excluded. Arrangements were made only for a certain number of reporters—six, I think, was the limit. And it had been necessary to arrange for the absence of one of these gentlemen, so that I, who unfortunately have never mastered shorthand, might be present. From my coign of vantage in the embrasure I could see some Westminster schoolboys playing in the enclosure. Their shrilling shouts punctuated the earlier deliberations of their lordships. Besides ourselves of the Press and the members of the Upper House of Convocation, the only other person present was Sir John Hassard, the courteous Registrar. His chief duty seemed to be that of ushering the gentlemen of the Press in and out of this hopelessly bourgeois Upper Chamber. And this was a ceremony of frequent occurrence. When their lordships considered that the trend of the debate made it desirable that strangers should retire, the Archbishop looked over to us, smiled benevolently, and observed: "If you please, gentlemen." It reminded me of Ponsford's early morning admonition to customers supping late at the Albion. We rose. Sir John preceded us to the door, opened it, and bowed us out. Presently—their lordships having concluded their private colloquy—he came out to us in the passage, and ushered us in again.

To me the surroundings, coupled with the irreverent and openly familiar attitude of the chief of my colleagues, came as a shock. I had anticipated that the Upper House would have sat in some gilded chamber of their own, or perhaps in one of the chapels of the Abbey. I had imagined myself, as the representative of the profane vulgar, sitting hidden away in some lofty gallery. But here I was hobnobbing with the Bishops, as it were. It was a sense of unsolicited intimacy that possessed me. And when I reflected that I was one of the very persons whose conduct was under debate, I had the further sensation of being a spy in the camp. Mr. Basil Cook, the chief of the staff reporting in Convocation, was disturbed by none of these scruples, and when he noticed that a Bishop was speaking from a written document, he went up to the venerable orator at the conclusion of his speech,

and boldly asked him for his notes. In one case, indeed, the intrepid man seemed to collar the ecclesiastic's notes by force.

Of the debate nothing remains in my memory save the speech of the Bishop of Winchester. Tall, gaunt, marked down even then by Death, Harold Browne proved himself intellectually as well as physically head and shoulders above his brethren. His words were weighty, well chosen, impressive. His message was one of grave reproof. He deplored the introduction of the topic. He warned Convocation of the danger of registering its views in resolutions of the House. Resolutions which were foredoomed as inoperative, he argued, must stultify them as a high deliberative assembly. But the warnings of My Lord of Winchester fell on deaf ears. Their lordships were out after the Sunday amusements of the rich. They were not to be balked of their sport. They passed their resolutions. And from that hour the rich have gone on extending the scope and scenes of their Sunday amusements.

Of my own descriptive account of the proceedings, of course, I say nothing. But Sala made it the text of one of his inimitable essays. His comments, I remember, concluded with these words :

"It may interest these Reverend and Right Reverend Fathers in God to know that the resolutions which they have just registered will have about as much influence on the Sunday amusements of the rich as a similar set of resolutions passed by the Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes."

Very soon indeed the Church discovered that, there being no hope of stemming the tide, their only chance was to make things easy and agreeable for those who were borne along by it. Accommodation for bicycles was announced here and there by a far-seeing Vicar—temporarily characterized as a "crank." And in villages down by the banks of the Thames, Rectors began to intimate that visitors in flannels were welcome to worship. Sunday clubs multiplied on the banks of "Sweete Temmes." Sunday golf clubs were established on a thousand links. The introduction of the automobile has precipitated matters. The word "rest" has had appointed to it the only reasonable interpretation.

And the twentieth century Anno Domini has definitely declined to be bound any longer by an enactment forced on a nomadic and unruly crowd by a Jewish leader who "flourished" nearly twenty centuries before Christ.

It is interesting to note that this consummation was helped forward by the ill-advised action of a bench of Bishops. And it is amusing to remember that their lordships were acting on the initiative of a man-about-town, of Hebrew extraction, who personally did not care a cent for the observance either of the Jewish Sabbath or of the Christian Sunday.

The Pelican Club was not a very long-lived institution. The founder had not taken into account the gradual nature of all processes of evolution. He had gone too fast and too far. There was, indeed, a growing feeling in the public mind that the observance of Sunday as ordained was irrational. But the vast majority of those who confessed to that frame of mind would contend that to watch boxing contests and listen to comic songs in a hot and crowded arena was a still more irrational manner of keeping the Sabbath. The movement was toward outdoor exercise, healthy recreation, fresh air, and the open road.

When the Pelican Club ceased, it was for a short space reincarnated as the "Barn Club." The constitution, ownership, and membership, were practically identical with those of the earlier venture. Here, however, the building was erected by Wells. He was free from the demands of a landlord, which in Denman Street had increased in exact proportion to his own growing prosperity. The new premises were in Gerrard Street, Soho. And I understand that the founder made rather a profitable deal when he disposed of the building to an electric lighting company or to a telephone company—which was it?

The name of the Pelican Club still persists in the title of a theatrical paper conducted by Mr. Frank Boyd. Never before, I should imagine, was a journalistic success achieved at so small an expenditure of either brains or capital. But Frank was ever a canny man; he understood the small public for whom he catered, gave them, at small cost, what

he considered good for them, became that enviable personage the owner of a paying newspaper property, and so continueth even unto this day.

Boyd sanctified his association with the stage by marrying Miss Agnes Hewitt, a well-known actress who is understood to supply her husband with his Society gossip and his latest fashions. His original ties were rather with the Church than with the Stage. He was the son of Dr. A. K. H. Boyd, of St. Andrews, author of "The Recreations of a Country Parson"—the "Boyd that writes" of Carlyle's famous sneer.

The passing of the Puritan sabbath has conferred benefits also on those who are entirely out of sympathy with the new order of things, and who still patronize the institution of public worship to the extent of attending church or chapel twice or even thrice on Sunday. The priests and the pastors have awakened to the fact that if they would retain their congregations they must give them bright, cheery services, and sermons which, if not eloquent or convincing, shall at least be interesting and intelligent.

Huxley flung a gibe at the "corybantic Christianity" of General Booth. But "corybantic Christianity" has held the proletariat by substituting one sort of excitement for another. And the great middle classes can only be kept in leash for a while longer by music and oratory of a kind which, a century since, our militant Protestant forbears would surely have regarded as, in themselves, grievous acts of Sabbath-breaking.

Sabbath-breaking, quotha! The Sabbath set up by the dour, morose, uncharitable religionists of my childhood has been broken into bits, nor will all the skilled science of enthusiastic collectors ever piece it together again.

CHAPTER VIII

ODD FISH

LONDON streets have been cleared of their professional "odd fish" owing to the parental solicitude of the police. The expensive operations of the London County Council having swept away all the remnants of Dickensland, the police have gathered up and carried away any Dickensque characters that survived the advent of the reforming Council. All things considered, our ædiles have acted wisely in the interests of Londoners. They have gained experience and confidence. Such early mistakes as the architecture of Shaftesbury Avenue and Charing Cross Road will never be repeated. The progress of Kingsway and Aldwych prove *that* at all events. If we are to lose the ancient picturesqueness, we are to have in return spacious roadways flanked by architectural dignity.

If, however, we rejoice in the erection of palaces on sites once occupied by rookeries, we must surely sometimes experience a pang of regret over the disappearance of the eccentric characters of the town—the quaint Londoners who made a living out of their eccentricities or their afflictions. Those of them who were not removed disappeared, no doubt, owing to natural causes. But no successor was admitted to have a valid claim to the vacant place. The streets are clear of mendicant freaks, and even of those quaint itinerants who performed on the chance of a public recognition of their exhibitions. Codlin and Short no longer—as in the *Punch* pictures of John Leech—set up their stage in West End squares. The man in soiled tights who released himself from ropes coiled and knotted by confederates in the crowd

is never seen nowadays attempting his performance in the mouth of a "no-thoroughfare." His dirty fleshings would scarcely be tolerated even on a race-course. On second thoughts, I omit him from the odd street characters whom I miss from the London thoroughfares.

But there should have been someone of his household to carry on the tradition of the little cripple who used to sit on the pavement in front of the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square, making weird noises on a German concertina. Close by, in the mouth of Suffolk Street, Pall Mall East, a most respectable young man exhibited a "happy family" in a large cage. It was a most instructive lesson in natural history, and an illustration of the power of man over cats, canaries, rats, mice, dogs, and other specimens of what are popularly known as "the lower animals," and many a morning have I stood entranced as I watched a white mouse play with the whiskers of a cat, or seen a fox-terrier invite the familiarity of an exceedingly maleficent-looking rodent. There was some ethical teaching to be picked up also, for no doubt the result achieved by the showman was entirely the effect of moral suasion. "It is all done by kindness," as the showman of the circus used to say.

Then there was the old fellow who used to sweep the crossing at the top of King Street, where it enters St. James's Square. He was a rubicund customer, whose whole person seemed to reek of much good ale. He was dressed in the pink of the hunting-field, and wore the picturesque hunting-cap of the shires. He could scarcely have been a M.F.H. fallen on evil times, and haunting the clubland of the days of his vanity. Perhaps he was a huntsman or a whipper-in grown too fat or too bibulous for his work. He had certainly selected an eligible "pitch," and must have acquired a nice competence from the fogeys, old and middle-aged, who used his crossing. His attractive livery should have descended—for I deem the original wearer long since the victim of another sort of crossing—to an emulous son. The world is growing too drab. And even an æsthetic crossing-sweeper might do somewhat to improve its colour scheme.

Do you remember the accomplished harper who made

gay with his music the old flagged courts of the City? No one interfered with the performances of that descendant of David. He was permitted to make music within the sacred precincts of the courtyard in which stands Rothschild's famous house in St. Swithin's Lane. It was to this gracious permission, doubtless, that might be traced the rumour—repeated by the credulous sort in the City—that this player on stringed instruments was a poor relation of the financial princes of New Court. Since that musician was called away, no successor has been permitted to waken the dulcet echoes of New Court. Nor, indeed, are the efforts of strolling artists on sackbut or psaltery encouraged in the obscure byways of the City, a circumstance which is, I think, to be deplored.

Whenever I visited the City, a merchant who always fascinated me was one who had a pitch in the opening of a passage at the eastern end of the Poultry. Alas! the very passage itself is built over now, and the merchant and his wares have not become even a part of tradition. I have asked City men about him a score of times. I have never yet met one who remembers ever having seen him—ever having heard of him. They are the most expert forgetters in the world, are City men. And it is perhaps as well. A large proportion of the day's transactions there are best forgotten. The vanished merchant of the vanished passage had set up a stand on which he exhibited miniature articles in copper. The goods were most exquisitely finished, and were perfect models—made to scale—of their originals. Culinary articles were his chief stock-in-trade—kettles, frying-pans, Dutch ovens, dish-covers, coffee-pots, sauce-pans—all beautifully executed, and the largest of them not more than three inches in diameter. At one time I had an entire *batterie de cuisine* bought from him. He, too, should have had a successor; but possibly a successor might have found himself flattened out by the stores.

The sleight-of-hand performer has been gently pushed off the public highways. Him also I regret, and offer what incense I may to his memory. A smart-looking, precise, never-in-a-hurry young man, his expression was invariably

pensive, suspicious, contemptuous. He carried a little round table with a faded red cloth fixed to it, like that of a card-table, which indeed, in a way, it was. Ah those delightful tricks ! Cinquevalli and Charles Bertram have since worked their miracles for my behoof, but they have failed to arouse the same sensations which the performers of the West End street corners raised in my ingenuous mind.

Conjurers had sharp tongues, too, and their repartee was ready and pungent. I was walking down Bedford Street, Strand, one forenoon with the late Mr. J. L. Toole, the celebrated comedian. One of these roadside jugglers had set up his stand near the corner of Maiden Lane. He was performing some trick with a bottle and a piece of paper. Toole, who was uncommonly fond of practical joking, pushed through the little crowd, and, simulating the manner of a person in great pain and in a great hurry, held out twopence to the magician.

" I'll take a pennyworth of your pills and a pennyworth of your pain-destroyer," he groaned.

" Thank you, Mr. Toole," coolly observed the other, who had at once recognized the actor, " but I make it a rule never to take money from brother professionals."

His little audience laughed, now discovering the identity of the practical joker. Toole exhibited every outward sign of delight at the retort, tossed a florin to the victor, and whispered to me as we went off : " That's a dev'lish smart chap, don't you know ; but he took my money all the same !" I do not think, however, that he relished the incident any too well.

Barney Barnato commenced his financial career as a peripatetic conjurer, his beats being in the East, and not in the West End of the town. And, although I only knew him in the days of his prosperity, I did not find it difficult to discover in the millionaire the traces of the ancient calling. And, to do Barney justice, he was not in the least ashamed of his humble beginnings. In this he differed considerably from certain other South African magnates whom I have met. Who persuaded Barney to build the pretentious, over-ornamented palace in Park Lane I do not know, but I feel sure it was never undertaken on his own initiative.

There was one very odd fish who perambulated the Strand in the seventies. The cut of his clothes—which were old but well brushed—was early Victorian. His light-coloured hair was divided at the back most mathematically, and a wisp of it was drawn over each ear after a fashion set by costermongers and adopted by Lord Ranelagh. He wore his hat cocked over one ear, and he sported a straw-coloured moustache to match the hair of his head. His whole appearance was that of a dandy run to seed. He might have been a forgotten ghost of the Regency. He carried a Malacca cane with tassels, and behind him there followed a white poodle. The man and the dog made one of the features of the Strand. The poodle never left his master's heels. Hundreds of times have I watched the pair of them pass along the street. The dandy seemed to know nobody, nor did anyone ever salute him; yet he was an intimate part of the show.

There came a day when he made his promenade—alone. And he was attired in mourning. Whether he had donned sables out of respect for the memory of his canine friend I cannot say, but the dog was dead and the man was in mourning. Shortly after this the buck of the Regency himself disappeared. Then inquiries were made. The dandy was dead. He had lodged in Westminster. He was a half-pay Major, and, except that he dressed oddly and clipped and groomed his poodle with his own hands, he appears to have had few eccentricities. His landlady wept as she spoke of him. “My dear gentleman” she called him, and she had a hundred and one stories to relate of his kindly disposition, his practical benevolence, and his racial pride. He was a Scotsman.

Of the same period as that of the Scots Major was Kitty, the old Irish flower-seller. Kitty was about seventy years old when I first made her acquaintance. She perambulated the north side of the Strand, her beat being bounded by the old Gaiety Theatre on the east, and by the Adelphi on the west. She was a “character.” She knew nearly all her customers by name, though how she acquired the information the Lord only knows. “Witty Kitty” she was called,

and not without good reason. I was standing one day on the step of the *Globe* office, talking to Henri Van Laun, the friend and translator of Taine. Kitty came up to us with her basket of sweet-smelling wares. Van Laun, who hated an interruption while in the act of unwinding one of his interminable yarns, motioned her away with a cross word and an angry gesture. Van Laun was a Jew who had the national characteristics very severely marked in nose and lips and complexion. Kitty did not at once accept her dismissal.

"Ah, buy one for the love o' God!" she persisted.

Van Laun turned on her. He was professedly an agnostic, and fond of airing the fact.

"No, no! Who is zis Almighty zat I should buy for love of him? Hey?" he queried fiercely.

"Och, sir," said Kitty, in sad, reproachful accents, "an' is it pretendin' not to know Him you are—an' you wan of His *chosen* people!"

The calculated accent on the "chosen" was delightful. From that day Van Laun became one of "Witty Kitty's" most profitable customers.

Human freaks are now steadily discouraged by the police. But in an earlier time men and women were permitted to parade their afflictions or deformities in the London thoroughfares. There was a horrible cripple who used to propel himself about Trafalgar Square and its vicinity. Apparently his motive power was confined to his arms. His progress along the side-paths was like that of a seal. He was attired in a white nautical suit; he had big round eyes which he rolled about in the most curious way. Women were much frightened on beholding him for the first time, and I suspect him of having been an arrant impostor. Then there was the old lady who perambulated Whitehall, the top of her head pointing to the pavement. She was bent literally double. I once saw Mr. Gladstone (I mean, of course, the eminent man of that name) stop and address her and give her a coin. The Grand Old Man had a great taste for curios and antiquities. The one-armed sailor—he carries the other down his side—and the one-legged mill hand have been relegated to the suburbs, and even there

they have become discredited, I think. And as to the miserable wretches who used to exhibit their sores and open wounds, a public that liberally supports hospitals won't tolerate any more of that sort around.

But while I have been recalling a few of the odd fish who frequented the thoroughfares in the quarters of the town most affected by gentlemen of the Press, I have been somehow conscious all the time that, however interesting the recollections may be, they are scarcely of the particular type of odd fish which I set out to describe. My intention was—and is—to recall some of the eccentric persons on the Press, or those eccentrics with whom the Press brought me into contact. To that task I now address myself.

One of the queerest fish of my time was Mr. William Henry Bingham-Cox. He was a tall, swarthy man—swarthy, indeed, is euphemistic, for the man was as copper-coloured as a Hindu. He had big lips and a head of curly black hair. The tar-brush had at some time played an important place in his evolution. He had at one stage of his career been a clerk in the Bank of England. On inheriting a certain legacy, he threw up his appointment in Threadneedle Street, and bought a paper—then in very low water—entitled the *The Licensed Victuallers' Gazette*. He seemed from the first to be able to interest "the trade," and greatly increased the advertising income of his purchase. It was not, however, until he conceived the happy idea of publishing bright and cleverly-written accounts of old prize-fights that the *Gazette* began to feel its feet and to make big strides in the favour of the public.

Although Bingham-Cox was believed by many of his contemporaries to be as mad as Bedlam, there was a certain method in his madness. He had the *savvee* to see that the new edition of the old fights must be of some literary excellence, that the stories must be retold with a graphic force and without a nauseating repetition of the worn-out *clichés* which, strangely enough, gave relish to the original accounts when, years before, they appeared in the columns of *Bell's Life*. His first selection was a fortunate one. Sydney French was the chosen historian of the "fancy." He

approached the subject with an open mind, for he had never seen a fight and knew nothing of the prize-ring. But he was an all-round journalist, and could produce a readable column of copy on almost any given topic within the hour. "The Dean could write well about a broomstick!" exclaimed Stella. That was the sort of journalist French was. He could write well—that is to say, in an interesting way—about a broomstick. He was not always what you might call *on* his subject. But he was always somewhere round about it. And he was never dull. He kept on at the fights until his death. French was on the staff of the *Dispatch*, and found the Cox engagement a very nice addition to his income. The honorarium for the fight article ranged from seven to ten guineas a week.

When French died, Bingham-Cox was in despair. Many men had a "try" at the game. But it was not as easy as it looked. Man after man was found wanting. Among others who took a hand at the task was Mr. T. P. O'Connor, now M.P. for the Scotland Division of Liverpool. "Tay Pay" has a fine roving style of his own, but was apparently unequal to the Homeric strain essential in the epic of the Ring. Willmott Dixon was sent for, and for many years he was not only the writer of the prize-fights, but editor of the paper. French was bad to beat, but Dixon beat him, and beat him easily. Dixon had a knowledge of the Ring; he could "put up his dukes" himself, thoroughly enjoyed "a bit of a scrap," and his Cambridge experiences stood him in good stead. His memory, too, was rarely at fault. I never met a journalist so independent of books of reference.

Bingham-Cox was a great theatre-goer. His widowed sister kept house for him over the offices of the paper in Southampton Street, Strand. She usually accompanied her brother on these outings, and, though his paper had no recognized position in the theatrical world, "William Henry" used to besiege the acting-managers for stalls and boxes. When he succeeded in capturing a couple of free seats he was as pleased as Punch, although they usually cost him three or four times their market price, for he invariably indicated his appreciation of the manager's civility by

sending him a box of cigars. As the cigars were generally "Flor de Cuba" or "Cabañas" of a famous crop, one may imagine that acting-managers were not unwilling to oblige him if they could. The strange man did not smoke himself, and was horrified if anyone came smoking into his office.

Occasionally he contributed to his own columns. His contributions were usually of a more or less libellous nature. He called me in on one occasion to advise about the opening paragraph of a short dramatic notice which he had written. The thing was in proof. It dealt with a play by Sims and Buchanan called "The English Rose." From the tone of the essay I inferred that the eccentric proprietor had been unsuccessful in getting free stalls at the Adelphi, where the play had been produced. The paragraph about which he seemed particularly anxious was the opening one. It ran in this way :

"This is the most extraordinary production we have ever been invited to witness. It is an Irish melodrama. It is entitled 'The English Rose.' It is written by a Scotsman and a Jew, and it has been put on the stage by two gentlemen of Swiss nationality."

"What do you think of it?" he exclaimed, grinning and showing his gleaming white teeth.

"I think you are wrong about your facts."

He glared at me, exposed his teeth more than ever, stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and asked :

"What! what! Wrong in my facts! Nonsense, my friend, nonsense!"

"In the most material statement you are wrong," I persisted; "for Buchanan is not a Scotsman, and Sims is not a Jew."

"Ah," he cried, grinning more fiercely, "then it's not a libel!"

"That's as may be," said I; "for to my mind the law of libel resolves itself into this: Whether twelve men on their oaths consider that the words published by A have injured B."

He went to his desk, initialled the galley, rang the bell, and handed the slip to the man answering the summons, with the

intimation : " For the printer." Then, turning to me, he said defiantly : " I'll let it go."

Whether it ever *did* go I never inquired. The reminiscence comes back to me unbidden. It had clean vanished from my memory from that day to this.

He was constantly—but, as I believe, quite unconsciously—giving offence to all sorts and conditions of men. His black beard, curly hair, gleaming teeth, and fierce grin, obtained for him an offensive sobriquet thus bestowed : One of his contributors sent him a letter resigning his position on the staff. He alleged but one reason for this course. It was : " I can no longer put up with the antics of a Barbary ape." The eccentric recipient of the letter, instead of putting it into the fire and forgetting all about it, assembled the members of the staff, and read the document as though it proved the hopeless insanity of the writer. Having read it, he ran round the room, pretending to scratch his arms after the manner of a caged monkey, uttering the most comical squeals and chattering his teeth no end.

He was drawn over the incident by Pottinger Stephens, who was running a weekly called *The Topical Times*. In that smart little journal a question was asked the following week in these words : " When did Mr. Bingham-Cox receive the degree of B.A. ?" The unfortunate man did not see what lay under the inquiry. He wrote a letter on the notepaper of the Junior Athenæum—the " Junior Prigs," as it used to be called—explaining that he had dispensed with the advantages of a University training, and that he was not a B.A. The letter appeared in Pot's paper in due course ; but with this heading : " *Mr. Bingham-Cox denies that he is a B.A.*" The person of the newspaper proprietor was less sacrosanct in the jocund days than in these greyer times.

Bingham-Cox was a collector in his way. He was very keen on engravings, and was by no means a bad judge. He started on his hobby long before the " engraving craze " set in, and his collection became worth four or five times the price he gave for it. The first-floor above the office was full of his samples from floor to ceiling. One day when

I was looking over the gallery in his company, he invited me to select a couple of the engravings. I chose two—by no means the least valuable in the collection—and was about to ask when I might send for them, when he whipped out a notebook, and saying, “I’ll leave them to you in my will,” made an elaborate pretence of recording the incident. He was a collector of musical instruments, and had a piano or an American organ on every landing in the house. The most intolerable trials to which he subjected his friends were his recitals on one or other of these instruments. As he crashed out his Masses and fugues he rolled his head, showed his teeth, and grinned awfully, as though he thoroughly enjoyed witnessing the torture he inflicted.

The end of his story is a mingling of tragedy and comedy. He sold his paper. During the years in which he had conducted it he always “lived over the shop.” He could never have spent a fourth part of his net profits, and the balance had been well and luckily invested. When he received the purchase money for the *Gazette* and left Southampton Street, he was worth considerably over £100,000. When he crossed the threshold of his old offices his astuteness and his luck seem to have deserted him. He bought a brewery in St. Albans, where he had a house. From the first this venture was foredoomed to failure. He became the prospective Unionist candidate for the division. But Captain Middleton and the Central Office would have nothing to do with him, and ran a candidate of their own against him. Bingham-Cox persisted, and actually went to the poll. At this period I became more intimately associated with the eccentric man. I made some speeches for him, and even canvassed the independent electors. More than once during the campaign I thought it my duty to inform him that his methods, should he be elected, must insure his being unseated on petition. He only bared his teeth at the suggestion. He was quite sure of winning, and he was equally sure that there would be no petition.

One of my trials in accompanying him was being obliged to drive about with him in a little village cart, painted a vivid green, and drawn by a big black donkey. The

candidate, with his swarthy face, grizzly beard, and fierce expression, might have been the *avant-courier* of some travelling show. The little villagers evidently accepted him as something of the sort, and accompanied the strange vehicle and its grinning occupant in and out of their hamlets with joyful "whoops." He was badly beaten at the polls. I don't believe that even the well-bribed employés in the brewery voted for him. Then the brewery itself went smash, and Bingham-Cox returned to Southampton Street (the new owners of the paper having found less expensive premises), and recommenced life as a newspaper proprietor.

His new paper was called *The Rocket*. His idea was to give the public a *Truth* for a penny. The title was an ill-omened one. The paper went up like the explosive after which it was named, and came down like the stick. He sent for Clement Scott, and instructed him to write an article dealing abusively with stage-players. Clemmy agreed provided his name was kept a profound secret. Bingham-Cox promised. The worthy man had probably suffered from some further slight at the hands of the managers. "Cut 'em up! Slash 'em! Flay 'em alive!" he exclaimed to the accommodating contributor. Scott, secure in his anonymity, proceeded to cut up, slash, and flay, the unfortunate mummers in a strain of pious indignation that was peculiarly his own. The article duly appeared with Clement Scott's name in large letters both at the top and bottom of it. Scott never really got over the incident, and his reproaches had no effect on his employer. "Breach of faith indeed! Why, you have broken faith with a whole profession!" was the only satisfaction he could get from his betrayer.

The *Rocket* was a failure from the first. It stopped for want of funds. For the unfortunate man had been drained dry. Even the engravings and the musical instruments had gone. In a few short years his fortune had melted. He was overdrawn at the bank; he had not a cent in the world. One morning the word went round that he had been found dead in bed, and there was no inquest.

Arthur T. Pask was a name with which the public became

acquainted in the eighties. He wrote in Christmas numbers, annuals, and story magazines. He had established relations with the *Standard*, and used to write "turn-overs" for that journal. His copy always appeared to me to be devoid of merit, but personally he was a most interesting man. He was engaged in the Affidavit Department of the Royal Courts of Justice. One would have imagined that in that office he would come across plenty of material for his fictions. He preferred, however, to evolve these from his inner consciousness, and to this end he appeared to live in a set of circumstances of his own invention. At one time he became subject to the hallucination that he kept a yacht. He appeared in Fleet Street one day in the most weird sort of nautical rig. With his yachting cap, white shoes, and reefer jacket with brass buttons, he had the appearance of the steward of a penny steamer. He breathed a sea-air. His conversation was of the "Royal Squadron"; his similes were drawn from out the vasty deep. He had acquired something of the roll of the mariner, and his acquaintances humoured him in his delusion, and, if they laughed, Arthur himself also was perfectly happy. One of his nautical impromptus uttered by him during this phase has remained with me. We began discussing a comet then due in the heavens, and were talking the customary foolishness about the chances of that heavenly body striking the earth. Pask was equal to the occasion and ready with an expedient. "By Jove!" he exclaimed breezily, "we must throw out cork-fenders over our lee bow!"

A remarkable figure in those Fleet Street days was that of a man who was known by two nicknames, and whose real name appeared to have been quite forgotten. He was tall and thin, had a broken nose, a small stubbly moustache, and had acquired the peculiarly disagreeable habit of addressing every person with whom he had business as "Cocky." This curious person had originally been a baker in Fetter Lane. But while his hands were busy in the bakehouse, his heart was in the race-course, and when his batch of bread was out of the oven and in the baskets of the distributors, the honest tradesman was off to the

terminus to catch a train to Newmarket or Doncaster or Epsom. He became as well known on the race-course as Steele or the Duke of Westminster or John Porter. And the nickname bestowed on him—it originated in the Ring, no doubt—was “the Flying Baker.” There could, of course, be but one end to a sporting career of the kind. As Dick Dunn once said to him, not unkindly, “You should be bakin’ ’em, not backin’ ’em!” But no backer ever takes that sort of advice; he has so much faith in his own good luck, coupled with his sound knowledge of a handicap, that he keeps on to the end—the invariably bitter end. The “Flying Baker” had hoped to break the Ring, but the Ring broke the “Flying Baker.” The hungry creditors refused to be satisfied by bread alone. The unfortunate victim went through the Court, and Fleet Street and Fetter Lane knew him no more—for a time.

After a space of years he reappeared in his old haunts. He had obtained a post on one of the sporting papers. Whether he was on the editorial staff, or in the publishing department, or a mere messenger, I do not know. He came round to chambers with a note for me one day.

“I want an answer to this, Cocky,” he observed.

“You’re a bit familiar, don’t you think?” I ventured to remark.

“What say, Cocky?” he inquired, with the most innocent air in the world.

I considered it unadvisable to pursue the conversation. I wrote my reply to the note he had delivered, and handed it to him without a word.

“Well, so long, Cocky!” he said as he shambled off.

In this reincarnation of his he was known in Fleet Street as “Newman Noggs.” His real name need not be recorded here, as it is borne to-day by a son who has risen to considerable eminence in one of the artistic professions.

CHAPTER IX

MORE ODD FISH

MY odd fish should have been disposed of in a single chapter, but one has lingered over the memory of them. After all, they contributed the comic element—or some of it—to many hours that lapsed in laughter. And shall one not be grateful to them or to their memories?

A considerable proportion of my Press work had to do with the theatres. I was acquainted with most of the actors and managers of my time, and some of the oddest fish that ever swam into my ken were connected with the “profession.”

There was, for instance, William Duck—manager, theatre-owner, impresario. Duck commenced life in some very humble capacity in the West of England. By a practice of punctuality, civility, a strict attention to business, and the other virtues which are supposed to furnish forth the complete British tradesman, he became a music-seller and purveyor of musical instruments. In this capacity he evolved, by easy stages, into a booker of theatre seats. And although Duck would not know a good play from a bad one, he saw in the theatre an easy way to fortune. He felt his feet by dabbling a little as “sharer” in likely ventures. But he found himself, and, incidentally, founded his fortune, when, acting alone, he purchased the country rights of “Our Boys.”

How much Duck netted out of that most diverting comedy I cannot say; but I know that it was a prodigious sum. When first the money came tumbling in, the happy man built him a lordly pleasure-house. In his new mansion there were prominent two works of art: a statue of William Shakespeare and a life-size portrait of Henry Byron. But,

of the two, Duck always considered the author of "Our Boys" to be the greater genius. He thought no end of the writer of the play that brought him his first really big returns. I met him, in deep mourning, a short time after Byron's death.

"Ah, sir," he said, shaking his head, "we'll never see another man like him—not in *our* time."

And Byron took every advantage of his admirer's infatuation. Anything that Byron brought him in the shape of a play Duck bought. When Duck followed his idol to the Elysian Fields, his executors came upon a whole press full of Byron manuscripts which were little more than "dummies." Byron had parted with his birthright for a mess of pottage, and considered that he was justified in thus getting back a bit of his own.

Becoming interested in productions running at one or two of the West End houses, Duck was now frequently to be met "in front," and became known to members of the Press. He was an exceedingly common-looking man, and one of his eyes always oozed moisture, which caused him to raise his handkerchief to his face while he conversed—a habit which acquaintances at first found a little disconcerting. He was extremely ignorant—or, to speak by the cards, extremely uneducated—and he never employed an aspirate except when it was absolutely unnecessary. Which reminds me of a story.

When "Our Boys" was being played for the first time at Plymouth, Duck recollected having heard Byron say that he had never visited that town; so he wired to his favourite author to come down as his guest. Byron wired his acceptance. He probably had a new bundle of manuscript to pass on to his patron. Duck was at the station to meet the traveller with a programme for the afternoon's enjoyment. He was anxious, above all things, that Byron should see Plymouth's famous Hoe. So, when they had exchanged the customary civilities, Duck explained:

"I'm agoin' to take you round to see the sights; an' fust of all I think we'd better take a little stroll round the 'O!"

"Don't you think," asked Byron, fixing him through his monocle, "that first of all we'd better take a little stroll round the H?"

Duck looked amazed at his guest. He had not the remotest idea of the point of Byron's joke. He felt, in his confused way, that "'Enery Byron was gittin' at 'im." He smiled feebly, shook his head in modest deprecation, and answered :

"'Ar, you *will* 'ave your little joke, sir ; but it ain't the haitch after all, it's the 'O we're agoin' to see—the 'O."

"O !" was Byron's monosyllabic comment.

William Duck had in his company as "leading man" a capital actor named Edward George. Much of the success of "Our Boys" in the provinces was due to the admirable impersonation of Perkyn Middlewick by that excellent comedian. While on tour, and playing in one of the large towns in the North, an admirer of George presented him with a cameo pin, having the likeness of Lord Byron carved on it. Duck, who noticed everything, and who had twice as much curiosity as an old woman, seeing the pin in the scarf of the comedian, immediately said :

"Pretty pin, Mr. George ! 'Ad it giv' to you ?"

"It's a present," admitted the actor.

"Anybody's portrait ? Hey, Mr. George ?"

"Yes. It's a portrait of Byron," was the reply.

Duck started, came nearer to George, held his face close to the cameo, and then fell back laughing consumedly. When he had succeeded in controlling his merriment, he exclaimed :

"You've bin took in, my dear feller : '*tain't a bit like 'im !*'"

William Duck, you see, knew of only one Byron. And that was "H. J."

When Byron's play had run under Duck's management for five hundred nights in the provinces, the grateful manager thought that he would like to celebrate the event, and testify to his appreciation of the efforts put forth by the members of his company. It was, if I remember aright, in Liverpool that the play achieved its five hundredth night. Duck's idea was to give a supper at his hotel. "Comes cheaper 'n a lunching," one hears him say. He also deter-

mined—it must have cost him a pang, for William was mean, and that's the truth—to give a little present to each member of the cast. He purchased some cheap bangles for the ladies, and a "charm" of more or less precious metal for the watch-guards of each of the gentlemen.

The memorable night arrived. Duck took the chair, presiding with rustic geniality over the pleased, and indeed surprised, comedians. Supper at an end, Duck hammered for silence, and rose, amid cheers, to make the speech of the evening. He told the devoted band of players what a lot he thought of them, how their efforts had helped the success of the comedy, and, in a word, how tremendously pleased he was with affairs generally. He concluded his address in the following peroration :

"But, ladies and gentlemen, them's mere words. I wished to present everyone 'ere a solid token of my feelin's, so I 'ave determined to give each member of my company a little momentum of the occasion. . . . Waiter !" he called out to the smiling attendant, "bring in them momentums !"

H. J. Byron, in pre-Duckian days, added to the joys of the town by inventing "malaprops," which he used to put into the mouth of poor Mrs. Swanborough, of the Strand Theatre. But the advent of Duck put an end to that branch of industry as far as Byron was concerned. Duck found his own "malaprops," and in their presence the pale contrivances of the wit were "As moonlight is to sunlight or as water is to wine."

By the way, I would like to say here, in justice to an amiable lady long since dead, that Mrs. Swanborough was not at all the sort of person that the Byron anecdotes make her out to be. I was for years acquainted with her, and I never knew her to be guilty of such solecisms as the "H. J." series put to her account.

The banquet and the presentation of "momentums" exhausted Duck's capabilities in the direction of hospitality and largesse ; for he was penurious above all things, and desperately thrifty. In the drawing-room scene in "Our Boys," the stage directions provide for a chandelier in the centre of the ceiling. In the London production this

was ablaze every night with wax candles. The first night on tour, the property-master had provided candles on the original scale. Duck nearly had a fit when he saw the illumination. He summoned the property-man to his office, and—*both* eyes now shedding tears—he ordered that in future the candles be reduced in number by one half, and those that were used to be cut in four pieces. The expression of the property-man was one of mingled distress and contempt. Observing which, Duck, wiping his eyes, observed with a smile :

“The shorter they har, the longer they’ll last. See? Hey?” I suspect he saw, for he spat on the carpet; and made his exit without a word.

I remember another London manager who was before Duck’s time, and who possessed some of his peculiarities. This was Giovanelli, who engaged in theatrical and other entertainments in the east and north of the town. How this extraordinary individual came by the name Giovanelli I never knew. He was a Cockney Jew, with all the engaging characteristics of that delightful hybrid. His friends called him “Jo” for short. He had seen the world, had Giovanelli. Among other places which he had visited was Australia. It was on returning from that colony, I think, he adopted the rolling Italian name which he bore in after-life. What name he went out in is one of those interesting facts lost to the annals of the stage.

Besides running a theatre in the East End, the versatile “Jo” acted as a low comedian. He did not, however, quite fancy himself in the dual rôle of actor-manager, and neither, indeed, did the public. Therefore he always engaged a low comedian in his company to supplement his own efforts in that line. Indeed, the low comedian was the most important member of East End companies, the “comic relief” in melodrama being greatly to the taste of the untutored patrons. “Jo” once engaged an actor who seemed to go all right at rehearsal, but who on the first night excited the sibilation of “the bird.” At the end of the performance Giovanelli sent for him. He handed him some golden coins.

"That's your week's salary, my boy. You needn't come again."

"I demand your reason for this summary dismissal," said the chagrined performer, standing greatly on his dignity.

"Well," said Giovanelli, shrugging his shoulders, "if you *will* 'ave it—it's because you're a dam bad low comedian."

"And what price *you* as a comedian?" exclaimed the other.

"I know, I know, my boy," replied Giovanelli, in his oily, deprecating way; "but, you see, the public won't stand *two* dam bad low comedians."

Some time since I saw in the Death advertisements of the *Times* an announcement of the decease of Mr. Richard Barnard. "Dick" Barnard was one of the most impenetrable mysteries of the Strand. He was always well dressed; he posed as a racing man, as a journalist, as a *flâneur*. He managed to procure first-night invitations to all the important premiers. He had scraped an acquaintance with some of the best-known men on the turf, and was hand-in-glove with theatrical managers. The major portion of his time was spent in Romano's bar. But, for all his pose, Barnard never owned a race-horse, never was a journalist, never had the slightest interest in the stage. His success was founded on a well-groomed person, a supercilious manner, the judicious communication of any good racing information that came his way, and—indomitable cheek. For Dick was an adventurer pure and simple, having abandoned the career of billiard-marker in Birmingham for the greater possibilities of the Metropolis.

Like most of his kidney, his life was a series of financial "ups and downs." Sometimes he was full of money; as often he was stony-broke. It was during one of these latter periods that he was sitting in "the Roman's" lonely and disconsolate. To him entered, like a ray of sunshine, a man-about-town in his little way, a votary of the drama, and an habitué of Romano's. He was one of those, also, who took Dick Barnard seriously, supposing him to be a person of great influence on the Turf, the Stage, and in Society. Dick brightened up at the advent of his friend, but, of course,

he did not evince any particular elation. His satisfaction was naturally enhanced when the young man from the country invited him to lunch.

Barnard accepted in the manner of a man who was conferring a favour. They went into the narrow dining-saloon behind the bar—that was the only *salle à manger* Romano boasted in his halcyon days—and ordered luncheon for two from Otto the waiter. During lunch Barnard related such items of news as he thought would interest. And in return for these bits of scandal his friend told him that he had just been down in the Boro' selling his father's crop of hops, and that he was carrying home the spoils in his note-case—spoils amounting to several hundred pounds. To a man who had not fingered a banknote for a month of Sundays this was news indeed.

They did themselves fairly well—as well as a bill of fifteen shillings will allow two lunchers to do themselves at “the Roman's.” When coffee had been served, and the lofty-minded Otto had gone to take orders from another customer, the young gentleman leaned across the table, and whispered to Barnard :

“I'll pass you a tenner under the table ; please pay the bill and give me the change outside.”

“Certainly, sonny,” said Dick ; “but may I ask the reason of all this mystery ?”

“The fact is, I've no smaller change, and I owe Otto a bit,” was the answer.

“Oh !” said Dick sympathetically.

The tenner was duly passed under the table. The young man lit a cigarette and left the room, passing out into the “roaring Strand.” He waited for a quarter of an hour cooling his heels on the pavement, when he was rejoined by his friend.

“Your change, old chap,” said Dick sweetly, as he handed the youth five shillings.

“But, my dear fellow, that was a ten-pun note I gave you,” he said.

“I know,” replied Dick. “But, you see, *I owed Otto a bit too.*”

How the ingenuous youth explained matters to his father, I have never heard.

In 1871 I first made the acquaintance of E. J. Odell, the actor. He then seemed to be a man well advanced in middle age. He is still alive—one of the features and mysteries of the Strand. He is the last of the Bohemians—the survival of days (to quote Eccles) “as is gone most like forever.” He has contrived to make a lasting reputation as an actor. His impersonations were usually in burlesque or opera-bouffe. I can personally recall two of his Metropolitan engagements. One of these was in a burlesque at the Gaiety. But he failed there to justify the high expectations of the management. Even at rehearsal there were difficulties. Bob Soutar was stage-manager, and, being a bit of a martinet, he and Odell did not quite “hit it.”

Odell played on tour as Gaspard the miser in “Les Cloches de Corneville,” and I believe acquitted himself very creditably, which is no small thing to say of any performer following Shiel Barry in the same part. For Barry’s performance was one of the finest bits of acting seen on the London stage in my time. On the first night of Shiel Barry’s appearance in the part, I first understood the meaning of the phrase (Edmund Kean’s, is it not?), “The Pit rose at me.” When the curtain fell on the second act of “Les Cloches,” moved by the intensity of Shiel Barry’s acting in the final scene of the act, the audience rose to their feet in all parts of the house. It was an outburst of genuine enthusiasm which called the performer before the curtain again and again. Lord Kilmorey—at that time Lord Newry—was sitting next to me in the stalls. He does not strike one as being a very emotional sort of nobleman; but he was carried away like the rest of us by a wave of pulsating fervour which was quite irresistible.

But to return to Odell. If that gentleman has not achieved a long record of successes *on* the stage, he has certainly made a great reputation *off* it. My friend Hollingshead was right when he described Odell as a monologue entertainer. His entertainments, to be successful, must,

however, be of a private or semi-private nature. Certain of his ballads are conceived more or less on the lines of Sala's "Bet Belmanor." One of them was a weird thing commencing :

" Oh ! was it in the garding,
Or was it in the 'all ?"

He had an unctuous manner of rendering this gem which was quite his own—a manner unique and of humour all compact.

There can be little doubt that Odell deliberately adopted the pose of an eccentric. He enjoyed the surprise and interest occasioned by his appearance when he promenaded the Strand. He had a thin, clean-shaven face which would have been ascetic were it not for a perennial smile. He wore his hair long ; rolling down on his shoulders, it fell in a brown cascade. Above was a wide black sombrero tilted rakishly on one side. His coat—worn summer and winter—was an ulster cut very wide in the skirt. He walked with a curious swaying gait which caused the ulster to undulate its skirts from side to side. If his object were to attract public attention to his person, he most undoubtedly succeeded. Country cousins encountering the strange figure were sure to spot him as a celebrity of some sort, and inquire as to his identity. Every gamin, in that thoroughfare of gamins, was ready with the answer :

" 'Im ? W'y, that's Odell, the hactor !"

Odell has a very pretty wit of his own, and there is no member of the Savage Club—of which he is one of the oldest members—who can hope to get the better of him in repartee. I remember hearing him sit very severely on a pompous member of the old Lancaster Club, in the Savoy. Odell happened to invite one or two of his friends to drink with him. The rude and pompous person approached the group, and Odell, on hospitality intent, invited him to have a drink.

" Thanks," replied the would-be wit, " I only drink with gentlemen."

" Then, sir," flashed out Odell, without a moment's hesitation, " let me assure you that *you will never die of delirium tremens !*"

Odell's age has always been as profound a mystery as his place of residence. Much time and ingenuity have been expended by his associates in the endeavour to unravel these mysteries. As the place of his birth has never been divulged, there is an insuperable difficulty in obtaining information under the first head ; while as to the second, he has never been known to leave his club until all the other members have departed. Of all London, Odell holds the record of "latest to bed." The genial Bohemian has in his old age been very well treated by his clubs—more particularly by the Savage. But what the Savage Club would be without Odell one cannot imagine. The chief of the Bohemian clubs cannot afford to lose the chief of the Bohemians.

Your average pressman, with an observing eye and an open mind, is bound to knock up against a greater number of charlatans than the member of any other profession. For publicity is to the charlatan the breath of his nostrils, and the Press is the most potent engine in procuring publicity of which the charlatan has any knowledge. And it will be borne in mind that your properly-constituted charlatan does not at all care what description of publicity he attains so long as the quantity is all right.

" Better be damned than mentioned not at all "

is his motto. Notoriety rather than celebrity is his aim.

Taking this as the measure of his aims, I conceive that the Marquis De Leuville was the greatest charlatan that loomed through all the jocund years. To begin with, he was no more a Marquis than I am ; and, to complete the absurdity of his pretensions, although he bore a high-sounding French title, he was not a Frenchman. But he had every possible claim to the title of "odd fish." He was an Englishman. His name was Oliver, and the place of his nativity was the city of Bath. Various accounts have been circulated concerning his early life. Some of these legends declared him to have been a hairdresser's assistant ; others, that he had commenced as page-boy to a Bath doctor. About these matters he himself was per-

sistently reticent. The literary world first heard of his existence by means of a novel in three volumes—at that time the simple and inexpensive method of publishing a couple of shilling's worth of fiction. I forget the title of the book, I never read it ; but I discovered some time after its appearance that, although the title-page described it as "by the Marquis De Leuville," it was the work of one of those literary "ghosts" of whose labours, all through his artistic career, the "Marky," as he was called, liberally availed himself.

The "Marky's" novel was reviewed in the daily and weekly Press. In many quarters it was even favourably reviewed. For there are snobs in Fleet Street, as there are everywhere else, and there were certain book-reviewers who would consider it bad form to say anything that was not quite civil about the productions of a Marquis, even though the title he bore was only a French one. The appearance, and newspaper acceptance, of the book established those friendly relations with the Press concerning which our friend Oliver had been so solicitous. Having once established his footing in Fleet Street, the "Marky" was most assiduous in his attention to those individuals with whom his work had found favour. By them he was introduced to others. And so he extended his connection like a good commercial traveller. It was rather unfortunate for the adventurer that, at the moment of his advent as a writer, Mr. Henry Labouchere had just commenced, in *Truth*, that crusade against impostors, charlatans, and social parasites generally, which at once made his paper and protected the public—one of those rare occasions by which public benefactors have made anything out of their labours. In the most matter-of-fact way Labouchere laid bare the pretensions of the mock Marquis, and left him without a rag of reputation to his back.

Little incidents of the kind are always allowed for in the calculations of an adventurer. The Marquis De Leuville, following the example of "ole Brer Fox" in the allegory, determined to "lay low an' say nuffin." When the Labouchere disclosures were forgotten, the scandal blown

over, and the sportsmen of Carteret Street busy on the trail of some other quarry, the Marquis-who-was-not-a-Marquis and author-who-was-not-an-author made his reappearance. Invitations to garden-parties at the Priory, Kilburn, issued by a Mrs. Peters, descended like a shower of snow on newspaper offices. And those who accepted them were received at the Priory by a very affable, not to say merry, widow, who had very sensibly discarded the trappings and the suits of woe. This was Mrs. Peters, the owner of the house and grounds. And in these pleasant surroundings we found the Marquis installed. The game was a very pretty one. Mrs. Peters was the widow of a wealthy coach-builder. And in the chaste fastnesses of Kilburn she had thought to establish a *salon*. Here she would play the part of Madame Récamier to the Chateaubriand of a Bath Oliver !

Quick to read between the lines, the journalists who had been induced to accept an invitation to the Priory were able now to piece together the whole story. The giddy relict of the deceased coach-builder was the founder of the "Marky's" fortunes. Her cheque had paid for the French marquisate. The Marquis De Leuville was, indeed, a work of fiction conceived, constructed, and given to the public, by Mrs. Peters. And it was a work of fiction transcending in human interest anything in the same line which could be produced by Oliver or his "ghosts." The *salon* at Kilburn failed to fulfil the hopes of its promoters ; Society—even society with a little "s"—fought shy of it. It was felt that Mrs. Peters as Madame Récamier and her protégé as Chateaubriand did less than justice to their several parts.

A suite of rooms was then taken for the Marquis in Victoria Street, Westminster, somewhere opposite the Army and Navy Stores. Here the indomitable humbug gave receptions, issuing the invitations in his own name. At these receptions one met the most weird characters—the shy denizens of the fringe of Bohemia, ostracized clerics, unread authors, swashbucklers of doubtful nationality, but about whose character there could be no sort of doubt whatever.

Mr. Harry De Windt, in his interesting book of reminiscence, gives an anecdote concerning the Marquis and his Victoria Street receptions, which, if worth telling at all, was worth telling correctly. I now relate the incident as it was repeated to me by Mr. Charles Collette, the well-known actor. At one of these assemblies in Victoria, Street the Marquis invited two or three of the guests to remain and "have a bite" with him. When the general body of the guests had retired, these selected individuals were taken to the dining-room, where the merry widow was discovered awaiting them. Half a dozen people sat down to a meal which consisted chiefly of potatoes and mutton cutlets. Collette sat on the left of the Marquis, who took the head of the table. The Marquis was not a pretty eater, and that's the truth. He detached a whole cutlet from the bone, and put it into his mouth as one bite. Looking up, he saw the amazed expression on Collette's face.

"I've got a devil of a twist," explained the Marquis.

"I see. An Oliver twist," said Collette sweetly.

De Leuville called on me once in Fleet Street while I was editing a weekly paper. One of my contributors had fallen foul of a poem bearing the nobleman's name. The reviewer had discovered in the verses every fault which the author of a poetical composition could by any possibility commit. De Leuville's principal object in seeking an interview was, he declared, to prove to me that "shore" was a true rhyme to "Samoa." He did not quite succeed. He was a man with a big, round, foolish face; he wore a moustache and imperial. He had very broad shoulders, and wore his collar so low as to give him something of a *décolleté* appearance. His black tie was big and flamboyant, and suggested the boulevards—as it was, no doubt, intended to do. His hair was long, and his broad-brimmed silk hat was worn slightly tilted to one side, indicating that he was rather a dog of a Marquis. He wore stays, which had the effect of adding, apparently, to the width of his shoulders. On his fingers were large rings of eccentric design. And the man literally stank—there is no other word for it—of unguents and essences.

That was the first occasion on which I had the doubtful

pleasure of seeing the Marquis De Leuville. The last time I encountered him was about three years since at Boulogne. He was a greatly altered marquis. His long grey hair fell over his shoulders ; he wore a black soft felt hat, a black velvet dinner-jacket. He looked a rather seedy and shrivelled Marquis. Altogether he had the appearance of a stunted Buffalo Bill fallen upon evil days. He was accompanied in his visits to the *établissement* by a group of octogenarian lady admirers. He lived in an hotel at one side of the estuary ; they lived in a hotel on the other. Everything was entirely respectable and platonic. And it was quite pathetic, I thought, to hear the shrill voice of the merry widow—for the “ Marky,” like the Pope, was still supported by “ Peters’ Pence ”—rebuking a friend, and announcing emphatically :

“ My dear, the Marquis has a soul above gambling ! ”

Messengers came and went between the hotels, and a pleasant interchange of amenities was constantly taking place. The Marquis, from his retreat near the railway-station, despatched little presents of scent and trifling sonnets to his mistress’s eyebrow. These manuscripts the recipient read in her high piping voice to her satellites, describing them as “ p’tee morr-sow.” And I suppose in exchange for the bottles of strange smells and the poems there was a generous supply of “ Peters’ pence.”

During his stay in Boulogne the Marquis invented a new boot-varnish, the secret of applying which belonged to himself alone. He spent quite an hour a day varnishing his boots, the result being that he was evicted, one after another, from half the hotels in the town. His varnish had a nasty habit of communicating itself to table-linen, carpets, or any other hotel property that happened to touch it. But Oliver stuck to his boot-varnish, and permitted himself to be driven from hostelry to hostelry rather than abandon it. He afforded a fine example of the old nobility sacrificing itself on the altar of principle.

A year after I had seen him in Boulogne I read of his death ; and the devoted chatelaine of the Priory, Kilburn, soon followed him into a realm where charlatanism is, we may imagine, at a discount.

Colonel Whitehead was another gentleman who thought it well to establish relations with gentlemen on the Press—on the principle, I suppose, that it is well to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. The Colonel was a great admirer of the stage, more particularly that department of the stage which devotes itself to the encouragement of histrionic talent in good-looking young women. He was a haunter of stage-doors, was admitted, here and there, to the *coulisses*, and was one of those patrons of the drama whose patronage takes a practical turn in the case of its female professors. In order to indulge his tastes in this direction, he leased the Canterbury for a season, revived the ballet with some of its ancient glory, and thoroughly enjoyed himself among the members of the corps. But the experiment was a costly one, and his operations were subsequently carried on at a less ruinous scale of expenditure.

He was one of the original members of Russell's Club for Ladies. Here he would turn up of a night with the largest shirt-front in London, in the middle of which sparkled a diamond of prodigious size. The Colonel was sitting one night in the drawing-room of the club, waiting, no doubt, for one of those ladies for whose special convenience Russell had founded his club. A boyish officer in one of the regiments of Guards was sitting not far off staring at the Colonel, whose get-up fascinated him. The youthful Guardsman was not nearly as sober as he might have been. Having gazed, fascinated, for a length of time at the Colonel, he called out :

"Waiter !"

"Yessir," said the servant who answered the summons.

"Oh—er—waiter, who's (hic) that man with the light-house in his stomach ?"

From that day to the day of his death Whitehead was known as Colonel Lighthouse. The Colonel had a big house outside Margate, to which at week-ends he invited his theatrical and literary friends. And the highest sort of high-jinks were carried on there.

A certain Irish nobleman was on his death-bed. The priest came to him. The holy man was anxious to get a

general confession from him. The nobleman declared he had nothing to confess.

“Look back on your past life, my lord. Is there nothing you regret?”

“Nothing,” he replied; “*I never denied myself a pleasure!*”

He closed his eyes, fell back on his pillow, and, in that happy belief, died.

Whitehead was a gentleman of that kidney, and brings to an end my selections from an almost inexhaustible list of odd fish.

CHAPTER X

BOHEMIAN CLUBS

THE promotion of clubs became a very busy industry under the consulate of Plancus. Of these promotions but few survive, and of these few none are of the proprietary kind. A club, to survive, must have arisen in response to an actual need, and out of the regular assembling of those who are kindred spirits, or who are brought together by common professional interests. The promoters of proprietary clubs are forced to provide for their enterprises both a demand and a supply. Were the gambling laws less drastic in this country, I can easily conceive that a fortune might be made by the proprietor of a roulette and baccarat club. But the promotion of ordinary social rialtos involves a considerable amount of risk. I must have belonged to a dozen of these mushroom institutions between 1870 and 1890, and I was on the committee of a fourth of them. But whether we started with palatial premises or with an unpretentious flat, the end came soon or late. Members seemed always to have an insuperable diffidence about paying their subscriptions, and proprietors had an equally insuperable objection to expelling defaulters.

For some years a gentleman named Russell displayed great pertinacity in pursuing this particular line of promotion. Mr. Russell was, I believe, the son of Henry Russell, the well-known ballad-singer. "Cheer, Boys, Cheer" Russell the old man was called. By his rendering of that song and other spirited compositions by Dr. Charles Mackay, he had added immensely to his reputation, and greatly assisted that tide of emigration that was then setting to the West. His son evidently did not believe in the depopulation of his native

land. He was keen on the construction of places of comfortable resort which would induce people to remain right here.

Russell's first promotion might have proved a success had it been properly financed and discreetly managed. It was founded at what was, or should have been, the psychological moment. It had really fine premises, splendid rooms, and an excellent service. It was situated at the corner of a street running off the Strand, over against St. Mary-le-Strand. It had a strong committee of well-known barristers and literary men, and it was, very happily, called the Temple Club. But in his desire to swell the roll of members, Russell encouraged laxity in the labours of the committee. Men were elected who would have been black-balled at any West End club, and men dropped in at night who were not members at all. The latter circumstance was brought to my notice in a very unpleasant way.

I had been at a performance at the Strand Theatre, and in the foyer I had met Mr. Vincent Boyes, a gentleman well known in literary and artistic circles. Boyes was a most highly respectable person, the very pink of propriety, and an inordinate stickler for *les convenances*. He was, moreover, a man old enough to have been my father. I invited Boyes to turn into the Temple Club for half an hour. He accepted. We entered the club, I called for some refreshment, and after it had been served we were joined by a man who was personally known to both of us. The new-comer was a soldier of fortune, a bit of a swashbuckler, a traveller, and a most amusing raconteur. It is unnecessary to mention his name in this connection. He kept us in fits of laughter for an hour, during which time both he and I had replenished the glass of the almost oppressively respectable Boyes. At the conclusion of one of the swashbuckler's narratives, Boyes said gravely: "I'm sorry I can't ask you fellows to have a drink with me, but I'm not a member." "Order away, old chap—no more am I!" exclaimed the cheery raconteur. Boyes regarded the man with a look of horror. He rose from his seat, took leave of me, and stalked out of the place without flinging even a nod to the soldier of fortune. That a man should have played the host to

him in a club of which that host was not a member was to Boyes the unforgivable offence.

In that same smoking-room there used frequently to meet a little coterie of journalists, among whom were Tom Dunning, one of the most respected men in "the Gallery"; H. H. S. Pearse, special correspondent of the *Daily News*; and Charles Williams, war-correspondent of many dailies in succession: for Charles, although an accomplished journalist, had an Irish temper, and frequently "quarrelled with his bread and butter." I have met many eminent romancers in my time. Charlie Williams could have given Baron Munchausen a stone and a beating. He spoke with a rasping North of Ireland accent, and his campaign anecdotes gained greatly by the stolid, matter-of-fact manner in which they were narrated. I recall now one of his campaign reminiscences. It is a quaint experience of a correspondent under fire.

"I had got under cover of a big boulder, and had tethered my horse beside me. I was just munchin' a beskit, when a shall burst on the rock, an' shot the nosebag right off my charger. He had shoved his daumned ould head out of cover."

"And you?" asked Pearse.

"I just went on munchin' my beskit."

"But," suggested Dunning, "if the shell took away the nosebag, it ought to have carried away the beast's head as well."

"*It did!*" replied Williams, with the utmost sang-froid.

In the same place, but on another occasion, I heard him aver with the utmost solemnity that he had been selected by the Liberal party to oppose Sir Hugh M'Calmont Cairns, when that eminent man—afterwards Earl Cairns—first stood for Belfast in the Conservative interest.

"Ef," declared Charlie, "I'd stud against Sir Hugh when first he put up for Bel-fawst, there'd be no such a personage now as Lord Cairns, Lord High Chawncellor of England!"

He was a bit of a romancer, was Williams. It should be admitted, however, that Williams did, at a later period in his career, stand as a candidate for Imperial Parliament. He opposed Herbert Gladstone at Leeds.

Another promotion of Russell's was his club for ladies. As a sort of major-domo for this establishment, Russell engaged the services of the obese but obliging "Fatty" Coleman, who had some time previously left the mild pursuits of a private life for the bustle of a public one. He was assistant-manager of the Aquarium when Russell captured him. "Fatty" was a broad and beaming man, of immense geniality, and in every sense a most expansive person. As the presiding genius of a club for ladies he was entirely in his element. But the time for what were irreverently called "cock-and-hen" clubs had not fully come, and this venture of the indefatigable promoter went the road to dusty death which had been taken by the unfortunate gentleman's other efforts to divert and refine human society. The adventures of the ingenuous "Fatty" would make a volume of their own. I last encountered him in a French watering-place, where he was acting as a sort of manager's representative to an hotel much frequented by Englishmen. He had lost some of his flesh, but none of his beaming bonhomie. There was a legend—I have never tested its authenticity—that "Fatty" had at one time held a commission in a regiment of the Guards.

While the social activities of Russell were at their busiest, the field was entered by another club-promoter. He, however, after a short experience became weary of well-doing. This was the Hon. John Colborne. The Hon. John—"Dirty Jack" was his sobriquet in his regiment—had become known to the public as the defendant in a criminal libel suit brought against him by a moneylender. John had got deep into the books of the remorseless Israelite, and, seeing no way of settling with him in coin, determined to pay him in kind; so he sat down and wrote an extremely diverting and trenchant little book entitled "The Vampires of London." Herein the methods of usury were exposed in a fierce light. This, however, the wily Jew might have forgiven. What he could never forgive was the ridicule which the gallant officer threw on his *ménage*. He had invited his customer to accept the hospitality of his home, and now the secrets of that home were held up to public ridicule and contempt. The writer

had not spared the members of the family. The very children of Israel were sacrificed on the altar of John's vengeance. The allurements of Rachael, the schemes of "blear-eyed Leah," were set forth with fiendish particularity.

The trial came off at the Old Bailey, and the prosecutor was represented by a rising barrister called Mr. Hardinge Giffard. That rising young barrister has, in so far as the Bar is concerned, risen and set many a day ago. He is now Lord Halsbury. The jury found for the persecuted Hebrew. The Hon. John was sentenced to certain months in gaol as a first-class misdemeanant, and ordered to pay a heavy fine. Defendants in cases of the kind were not so closely watched in those days as they are in the present year of grace, and when Mr. Colborne was called upon to receive sentence he was nowhere to be found. Having a very clear notion of the sort of verdict the jury would give, he had skipped over to France earlier in the day.

John had carried with him across the Channel a new and enlarged edition of "The Vampires," and he at once set about issuing copies by post to advertisers desiring to acquire a work about which the trial had set all the town talking. To stop this fresh persecution, plaintiff was willing to accept any sort of terms in reason. All that Mr. Colborne desired was liberty to return to his native land, to obtain cancellation of the excessive interest on his bills, and to live thenceforth in peace with all men. His friends were enabled to arrange terms on this basis, and John was free to prosecute those schemes for improving the condition of his fellow-man to which he purposed to devote his energies. His schemes were fated to "gang agley." He joined the Egyptian army, and died in action. It was probably the kind of death he would have wished, for, however he may have proved wanting in other qualities, no one ever doubted his high courage.

Chinery, in his club promotions, aimed at higher game. He had served as Consul-General in a West African State, was a member of the Reform and the Devonshire, was a convinced Liberal, and had a wonderfully good connection. Owing to these circumstances, he was able to muster a much

stronger committee than others who had started before him in the club industry. His first venture was the Empire Club. For this establishment he had acquired what the auctioneers call "eligible" premises. He got a lease of the house in Grafton Street, Piccadilly, which had been the last home of Lord Brougham. Men like the late (and great) Marquis of Dufferin became members. Viscount Bury was President of the club. A large membership, including many leading colonials, was assured. The management was reliable, the cellar unimpeachable, the house dinner (always presided over by a colonial Governor-General or some other potentate interested in our overseas Empire) became a welcome feature, and a long spell of prosperity seemed to be ahead of us. But our hopes did not reach fruition. Something went wrong with the accounts, and the Empire closed its doors.

The festive Chinery, in no whit discouraged, started on fresh promotions. None of them achieved the brilliant reputation of his original venture, and Chinery himself died a broken man.

At one time I belonged to a club called the Wanderers, in compliment, I suppose, to the Travellers, which was nearly opposite. The club-house occupied the corner, on the other side of Pall Mall, corresponding to that of the Athenæum. This was a comfortable and well-found establishment. Tod Heatley, the wine-merchant, was supposed to be interested in it; but it passed through many vicissitudes, and went under many names, till it was eventually devoted to more profitable purposes. Although the Wanderers had always other and higher pretensions, it was essentially a Bohemian club. A mixture of such pretensions with such actualities should be foredoomed to failure. In clubland the Wanderers was known as "The Home for Lost Dogs."

Chief among the genuine Bohemian clubs is the Savage Club, whose home is on the Adelphi Terrace. Although the Bohemianism of this famous club is mainly traditional, it preserves the good custom of general communication among members, and encourages that spirit of playful geniality which is inseparable from the idea of Bohemianism. But the Savage Club of to-day is a very different thing from the

same association as I knew it in 1870. This, indeed, will be admitted by the official historian of the club, Mr. Aaron Watson, whose admirable monograph on the Savage leaves nothing for any future writer to tell concerning the genesis and early struggles of the Savages.

I was a guest at the Savage on about half a dozen occasions in early years, and I once passed a few hours with Christie Murray in its new and more abiding home.

It was on a dull November day, and Pat Macdonald and I were walking westward from Fleet Street. We had taken Covent Garden on our way. "Let's see if there's anybody in the Savage Club," he said casually, as we left the central avenue of the market, under the shadow of St. Paul's, of the convent garden. To me the invitation was delightful. Often I had heard of the celebrated resort of actors, authors, and musicians. With the rest of the world, I had become impressed with the idea that election to this coterie was extremely difficult. I had read with much interest the first issue of "The Savage Club Papers," and it came upon me as a surprise that my friend Macdonald, whose contributions to literature were of the most tenuous character, should be a member, and that he should hold his membership so lightly.

Soon I discovered the reason, and this, by the way, is a rather interesting morsel of history which has escaped the vigilant eye of Mr. Aaron Watson. In those early and unsophisticated days, when a man was put up for membership at the Savage, he was given the run of the club until the date of the next election; and some men are by nature such excellent company that a club existing above all other things for congenial companionship will be apt to regard the claims of the professionally unqualified candidate as above those of the highly qualified man who happens to be a dull dog. This month of probation afforded the good fellow—"the clubbable man" of Dr. Johnson—the opportunity of asserting his claims; and although the committee was bound by its first rule, which provided that only men professionally connected with literature, the drama, or the arts, should be eligible, when they got the chance of electing a man of Macdonald's erudition, humour, and powers of conversation,

they were not likely to give that chance away. It was a strange rule, but it worked well. In those days there was no place in a club forced to forgather in a single room for men who could not talk well and laugh loudly.

Under the guidance of my friend, I crossed to the right through the inevitable slush and vegetable refuse, and we were soon mounting the steps that led to Evans's Hotel. With the celebrated Supper-Room beneath the hotel I was already acquainted, but I had never before visited the hotel. Nor did I for a moment imagine that the club which occupied so large a place in my fancy and my esteem occupied rooms on licensed premises. The Savage Club was in possession of the room on the left of the hall as you entered the hotel. It had originally been the coffee-room, and was one of the principal apartments in the building. Evans's Hotel is now the National Sporting Club. It was first the Falstaff, and to fit it for its new purposes considerable structural alterations were necessary, including a small private theatre, now abolished, but the lines of the old home of the Savages can still be made out.

There were very few members present on the occasion of this first visit of mine, and I was reminded of the omnipresence of the legal profession on finding that two of them were barristers. One was Mr. Jonas Levy, Chairman of the London, Brighton, and South Coast Railway; and the other Mr. Hume Williams—not the K.C. and Recorder of Norwich, but the father of that learned gentleman. Another of those present was Henry S. Leigh, the author of "The Carols of Cockayne"—a gentleman whom I came to know intimately. He had the bitterest tongue and sweetest nature of any man I ever met. The arrangements of the room testified to the simplicity of taste observed by those primitive Savages. On the tables that lined the walls were laid out clay pipes of the shape and size with which we associate the name "churchwarden," and I observed that Leigh was drinking beer out of a pewter pot. There are no pewter pots in the Savage Club nowadays, but neither are there any Leighs.

Whether it was the deadly dulness of the autumn afternoon or my own lack of responsiveness, or whether it was

that I had cherished exaggerated expectations, or whether it was the result of a conspiracy of all these causes, I cannot say, but my first visit to the Savage was a disappointment and a disillusion. A year or more went by before I was afforded an opportunity of reviewing my earlier impressions. This time I had no cause to complain of the quality of the entertainment. "Jimmy" Albery, who had recently made his name with "Two Roses"; H. S. Leigh; E. A. Sothorn; George Honey, the actor; Arthur Boyd Houghton, the artist; and Andrew Halliday, the author and journalist-dramatist, were among those present. My earlier impressions were at once erased. Never had I been thrown into the society of a number of grown men where such a spirit of fun, of *camaraderie*, of irresponsibility, and of the joy of life, prevailed and sparkled. They talked in the spirit of schoolboys, but with the point of seasoned wits. It was altogether a delightful experience.

It was at the Savage Club that I first saw the game of poker played. The game had been introduced by some Americans who enjoyed the privileges of corresponding membership in respect of their connection with the Lotus Club, New York. It was shortly made taboo by a ukase of the Portland and Turf Clubs, and disappeared from the card-rooms of all the West End clubs. I have always thought this rather a pity. Poker is one of the best games to be got out of a pack. It calls into exercise other faculties beside memory, judgment, skill, and a nice knowledge of the value of cards. You want to be a bit of a physiognomist. Your own expression should be under control, and your manner absolutely inscrutable. It is in respect of their natural endowment in these qualities that the Yankees make such good poker-players. I became greatly interested in the game, and it was indirectly through my instrumentality that its rules were first published in this country. General Schenk drew up the enactments governing the science of the pastime, at the request of Lady Waldegrave. Lady Waldegrave had them set up in type at Strawberry Hill. She had a few dozen copies printed for the use of her acquaintances. I became the proud possessor of one of these copies. A friend

of mine—or perhaps I should say a gentleman whom up to that time I had regarded as a friend—induced me to lend him the brochure to settle some dispute which had arisen between certain correspondents on his paper ; for my friend was a rather distinguished writer on the sporting press. I never saw that book again, but to my intense surprise and chagrin I found the whole of the Strawberry Hill rules published in the columns of my friend's paper, with their place of origin given, and Lady Waldegrave's authority cited.

The transaction did more harm to the gentleman who had betrayed my confidence than it did to me. In those days an act of the kind would be generally reprobated. Dog did not eat dog when Plancus was Consul. Nowadays I am given to understand that it would be regarded as a bit of smart journalism.

As I write, the memory of that first game of draw-poker comes vividly back to me, and, singular as it may seem to you, it comes back to an accompaniment of music. It was night, and in the supper-room below and at the back the little pale-faced choristers in their Eton suits were singing glees for Paddy Green's customers. These vocal exercises were resented by grumpy members of the club, but to me distance enhanced the beauty of the singing, and I never hear poker mentioned now, such is the strange influence of the association of ideas, that I do not instantly hear the far-away voices of boys singing :

“ Oh, who will o'er the downs with me—
Oh, who will with me ride ?
Oh, who will up and follow me
To win a blooming bride ?”

Poor words, perhaps ; set to old-fashioned glee music, no doubt ; introducing in the last line a word rendered vulgar by a merciless modernity, admitted. But, Lord ! how sweet the memory of them comes back to me over the years—how inexpressibly sweet, yet how incalculably sad ! for nothing but the haunting memory is left. My contemporaries of that time have, nearly all of them, satisfied their curiosity concerning the Great Secret. The pale-faced choir-

boys have grown to manhood, developing, perhaps, into "fat and greasy citizens." Only the song remains.

Baker Green, editor of the *Morning Post*, was a member of the Savage at a somewhat later date. He was a great hulking figure of a man, with a terrible mordant humour of his own, and a devilish solemn manner of stating the most absurd propositions. His monocle was as inseparable from him as that of Sir Squire Bancroft. His peculiar style of humour may be best illustrated anecdotically.

A member who loomed large in the life of the club in the days when the Imperial Institute was being nursed into life was Somers Vine. In respect of his services rendered to the Institute the excellent man received the honour of knighthood. It is to be feared that Baker Green had no great liking for Sir Somers. Of this sentiment on the part of his fellow-member, Vine, it must be supposed, had no inkling; for one evening, bubbling over with hospitality and brotherly kindness, he approached Baker Green in the club.

"I wish, my dear fellow, you would come down and spend a week at my place at Chislehurst," he said.

"Delighted," replied the other.

"I live at Vine Court," explained the knight.

Baker Green took out his pocket-book as if to make a note.

"What Court did you say?" he asked innocently.

"Vine Court," replied the pleased Sir Somers.

"Yes—er—and *what number?*" inquired the remorseless Green.

It is perhaps needless to add that the proposed visit was never paid.

Sir W. S. Gilbert was an occasional visitor at the supper-rooms beneath the club. The incident I am about to relate is scarcely relevant to the subject with which the present chapter deals, but as it happened on the premises, so to speak, I may be pardoned for introducing it. At Evans's it was the custom to pay for your supper to a waiter who stood at the door—a lightning calculator who, by the means of a legerdemain which was all his own, was able to add about 25 per cent. to every bill without the victim being

able to see exactly how it was done. Gilbert rather resented the arithmetical methods of "John," and at last came to the determination to pay "John" off by tipping him a penny instead of the sixpence which had hitherto been his *pourboire*. On the night on which his resolution was to be carried into effect his bill amounted to exactly half a crown. He handed that coin to the magic calculator, and then handed his tip of one penny. "John" looked at the coin, smiled a deprecating smile, and, handing it back to the donor, said in a tone of subdued solicitude: "Perhaps you may be going over a bridge, sir."

There was a toll levied on those crossing Waterloo Bridge in those days. The retort hit in two ways. The first suggestion was that the gentleman lived at the other side of the water; and the second, that he had been reduced to his last copper. The comment was, in fact, quite Gilbertian—as "John" himself was perfectly well aware.

The doyen of the club was W. B. Tegetmier. He seemed a survival almost of another age. For he was the same W. B. Tegetmier to whom Darwin, in his "Descent of Man," makes so many acknowledgments of assistance in connection with experiments in the breeding of pigeons. He was one of the first men to use the bicycle as a means of getting to and from his office at the *Field*, which was then in the Strand. He must have been well over sixty at the time, and he continued to use the machine till he was well over seventy. A wonderful, wiry, active, peppery-tempered little man with a kindly expression indicating a heart more kindly still. Not that he could not say a hard thing when he thought it absolutely necessary. By his intimates he was always called "Teg." But should any man who was not an intimate presume thus to address him, he would quickly resent the familiarity. Thus, on one occasion Mr. Powles, a barrister and brother-Savage, finding the little naturalist there, addressed him by his sobriquet.

"Hallo, how are you, Teg?" said the devoted man, bent on geniality.

"Quite well, thank you—Po!" answered the other icily.

I had the honour of attending two of the Saturday dinners

of the Savage Club. There was nothing quite like those dinners then ; there has been nothing quite like them since. No after-dinner speeches were permitted, but when the meal—a very simple one—was at an end, the members set about entertaining their guests and themselves by song, anecdote, recitation, imitation, and playing upon instruments—for some of the finest instrumentalists in England were Savages. Old George Grossmith—father of George Grossmith, the well-known illustrator of Gilbert and Sullivan opera and platform entertainer, and grandfather of George Grossmith junior of the Gaiety Theatre—gave us a reading from the first chapter of “Bleak House” ; Signor Foli sang “Simon the Cellarer” ; Oscar Barrett and John Radcliffe fluted to us ; Hamilton Clarke presided at the piano ; Charles Collette pattered ; George Honey gave some side-splitting stories, ably seconded in this department by dear old “Lal” Brough. The whole thing went with a “zip.” There was no hesitation on the part of performers ; the neophyte who “broke down” in his performance was as heartily cheered as the veteran who rendered a passage reserved for such a gathering. Indeed, the feeling that one was listening to an entertainment which the public could not have for love or money added not a little, I imagine, to the sense of pleasure in those who took part in the post-prandial entertainment.

The Arundel and the Wigwam were conducted much on Savage lines, and the Junior Garrick, to which I have made reference in an earlier chapter, was decidedly a Bohemian institution. It had two periods. It originally existed as a members’ club ; but a large number of influential members quarrelled with the committee and withdrew. The financial position of those who remained was not sufficiently strong to justify them in continuing it. And it seemed a pity to close the doors ; for the club occupied a fine house at the corner of Adam Street and Adelphi Terrace. It remains an excellent example of Adam architecture, and contains some magnificent Adam ceilings and cornices. The drawing-room on the first-floor, with its unrivalled view of the Thames, is a spacious and well-proportioned apartment.

The room beneath it was our dining-room, and the billiard-room was at the top of the house.

Now, whereas the Savage never suffered from any schism, the Junior Garrick was the victim of no less than two. The first while it was a members' club; the second, when it had become a proprietary club. The first offshoot organized itself into the Green-Room Club, which flourishes to this day, and is at present housed in Leicester Square, nearly facing the Alhambra. This is now the principal club, entirely composed of stage professionals. The second offshoot of the old "J.G.C.," as we liked to call it, was the Yorick. I know the Yorick still exists, for I recently saw in the daily Press a letter dated from that address.

In these days the Bohemian thinks it no longer good form to roam around the town attired in the negligent seediness of the impecunious student of the Quartier Latin. Unkempt locks, extreme squalor, and dirty finger-nails, are no longer regarded as essential characteristics of the social Bohemian. In the process of evolution we have now arrived at the evening-dress Bohemian. The Eccentric Club at Piccadilly Circus is his chosen resort. The phenomenal success of this club is attributable to the fact that the principal members of the original committee were business men; that it has been enabled to develop on a very small capital—some £700, I think; and that it was so fortunate as to acquire the premises, furniture, and fixtures, of an expiring institution at a ridiculously small figure.

This flourishing society grew out of the ashes of the old Coventry, a proprietary club which existed for some years in Coventry Street. When that rather cosy resort went the way of all proprietary clubs, a few of us met at Rule's, in Maiden Lane, with a view of seeing whether a sufficient number of old Coventry members could not be induced to found another social centre in which men who had for some years come to regard the Coventry as their ordinary place of meeting. The idea caught on. The title "Eccentric" was decided on at our very first meeting. The old premises of the Pelican were to be had on reasonable terms. And we commenced, with a good list of members, in those sacred

precincts. Among the actors who joined were "Lal" Brough and Arthur Roberts, and among the artists were Phil May, Julian Price, and Paleologue. The last-named gentleman adorned the walls of the club-house with some very spirited mural decorations. So spirited, indeed, was the fresco from the atelier of Paleologue, that when the club gave what were called "ladies' days" Paleologue's canvas had to be removed for the occasion. Knowing who some of the ladies were, and understanding something also of the characteristics of the committee-men who succeeded in carrying this proposal, the arrangement always struck me as being particularly quaint and insular.

One of the paintings of Julian Price was an inimitably clever likeness of Drummond, our head-waiter. No man was ever half so respectable as Drummond looked; and Price has caught his mild, inquiring, deprecatory expression to a nicety. His trim black whiskers increase the pallor of his face, and, to mark the members' appreciation of his high reputation, the artist has endowed him with a halo. We had taken Drummond on from the Raleigh Club. In carrying out his duties, Drummond was unaffected by the circumstances passing around him. The most mirth-provoking joke might be let off in his presence, but Drummond never turned a hair. When joking took a practical turn, and when he became the subject of the joke, affairs took on another complexion. And Drummond's reason for resigning at the Raleigh was—or was said to be—that Lord Marcus Beresford, in an access of boyish irresponsibility, had put Drummond into the ice-chest, shut the lid on him, and had then forgotten all about him. Fortunately, another waiter had occasion to go to the refrigerator before a fatality occurred, or poor Drummond would have become just so many pounds of frozen meat.

This extraordinary man, notwithstanding his serious mood, was the most painstaking, obliging, and solicitous club waiter I have ever met. He understood the gastronomic tastes of every member, and was infinitely desirous of giving satisfaction. He had one or two curious methods of pronunciation; I believe they had been imposed on him

by facetious members of the Raleigh. Thus, he always said "sooty" instead of "sauté." It became quite a habit to ask Drummond what potatoes were ready, for the sake of hearing his quaint version: "What potatoes to-day, Drummond?" "Potatoes, sir? There's biled, mashed, and sooty."

Drummond's reason for accepting service at clubs which remained open all night long, and frequently until four and five in the morning, was a singular one. It seems that he was a proper religious man, and held the office of deacon in connection with some conventicle in the suburbs. In accepting a position in a club where all-night sittings were the rule, he was free for every Sunday. I have seldom heard of a man sacrificing more for his religion—have you? If Drummond be still alive, he must be an old man by now, and may his declining years be peaceful! If he be dead, may the turf lie light on him!

The safeguard of a strong committee will never stand between a proprietary club and eventual extinction. One of the strongest committees I have known was got together by Mr. Earn Murray when he founded the United Arts Club. The promoter was enterprising, sanguine, and ambitious. But the only two private members of the club who ever succeeded in achieving notoriety were "Old Solomon," the racing tipster, and Percy Lefroy, the murderer of Mr. Gold.

Our legislature, which always does things in a grandmotherly sort of way, thought to purify the West End and suppress the Cyprian by closing the night-houses in the Haymarket and in the streets impinging thereon. The abolishing of those squalid dens did not, indeed, result in her disestablishment, but in the betterment of the conditions under which she carried on her sad but—if the unco' guid will permit the use of the word in this relation—necessary calling. Phryne, like the poor, we shall always have with us. The obvious duty of society, therefore, is not to take measures for her suppression, but measures for her amelioration and regulation. School Board education and an acquired knowledge of the laws of hygiene have done much for her. When one compares the toilet, the costume, and

the manners, of the *demi-mondaines* who nightly frequent the back of the dress-circle of certain houses of entertainment, with the tawdry, over-painted, giggling, solicitous creature of thirty years ago, then, and only then, can one understand the gratifying change that has taken place in the habitude of this inalienable excrescence on the body politic.

When the night-houses were closed, and the police instructed to keep the West End streets clear at midnight, there opened, here and there, clubs for the accommodation of Phryne and her friends. So that the closing of the frowsy saloons in which she had been wont to congregate was a blessing in disguise, and, indeed, fixes the date of the gratifying amelioration in her manners. For in the clubs a certain decorum was observed even in the ballroom, which afforded the *raison d'être* of social rialtos of the small-hours. The proprietors saw to that ; for the recurrence of disturbance or the report of sinister incidents might occasion a raid. Election to these clubs was not, as may well be supposed, a very difficult matter. One was proposed on the doorstep, seconded on the hall mat, and unanimously elected a member in the cloak-room. But the men "on the door" knew perfectly well whom to admit and whom to dismiss. The bully, the exploiter of frailty, the *souteneur*, were kept ruthlessly outside. Thus the proprietor protected at once himself and his customers. He ran a sort of *bon marché*, in fact, where no middleman operated between the goods and the patrons of the exchange.

The children of Israel—whose mission in these later years is to be both our paymasters and our panders—were particularly zealous in the promotion of this kind of *réunion bohémienne*. Belasco opened the Supper Club in Percy Street, Tottenham Court Road. Sam Cohen provided the "Spooferies" in Maiden Lane. He had previously run the concern as a baccarat club, its useful career in that direction having ended in a raid, and a prosecution of the greatest number of persons ever called up at Bow Street to answer a single charge. Sam must have been a bit of a cynic in his way, for the house in which the "Spooferies" met was next door to the Jewish synagogue. A Hebrew named

Foster established a similar place in Long Acre, and a co-religionist of his called Moore—a euphuism, I apprehend, for Moses—opened the Waterloo Club in Waterloo Place, Pall Mall. There were others. But those I have named are the only ones of which I had a personal knowledge. This admission may, I fear, horrify those readers who are of the dawn of the century. I can assure my prudish friends, however, that were I mischievously inclined I could give them a list of names of persons who were at one time young men about town, but who now occupy prominent positions in the Senate, at the Bar, and, generally speaking, in the public life of the country, who were to be seen, in the jocund years, thoroughly enjoying themselves in such Bohemian society as was to be found at the “Spooferies” or the Supper Club.

I can see—in my mind’s eye, Horatio—some adipose, sleek, and eminently respectable householder, some Member of Parliament, London County Councillor, West End physician, fashionable painter, or what not, who has taken up these reminiscences to while away an hour. I can see this staid citizen, this respectable family man, this stickler for morality, this Justice of the Peace, and all the rest of it, squirming as he reads the above passage. With a blush he lays down the book, and, looking suspiciously around, murmurs: “Damn the fellow, he means *me!*” Yes, I undoubtedly mean *you*. But you may read on without apprehension, my excellent friend, for I am the soul of discretion. Your early trespasses are safe. In return I would only ask this: that, remembering that you and I have sown some wild-oats in the same fallows, you should exercise a little more common-sense and charity in dealing with the peccadilloes of your juniors, and that, generally speaking, you would carry yourself with a less pompous air of conscious rectitude.

CHAPTER XI

THE JOKER

THERE are jokers and jokers. Professors of the art of practical joking are disappearing before an advancing civilization like the Red Indian of the Far West. The evanishment of the verbal joker is due to a deplorable shrinkage in the national sense of humour. There will soon be left to us the joker which is the fifty-third card in the pack, and is incapable of any sense or emotion whatever.

But in the days of my vanity grown men carried with them into a tun-bellied middle-age the fine flow of animal spirits and inordinate capacity for fun which nowadays would be deprecated by the well-regulated schoolboy. In Fleet Street one would have thought that there would have been no time for any joking beyond an occasional interchange of verbal pleasantries. But even in that busy thoroughfare the practical joker found—or made—occasions for the exercise of his fearsome talents.

It is something of a truism to say that the real man is very seldom the man as he is observed in his public appearances. Who, for instance, who only knew Edmund O'Donovan as the learned writer of travel articles in the *Quarterly Review*, the accomplished special correspondent of a one-time influential daily, the honoured guest of savants, the respected lecturer before Royal Societies—who, I say, who saw O'Donovan with his Society war-paint on could have imagined the wild, undisciplined, half-mad, but wholly delightful creature that was exhibited at intervals to Society in conventional garb. He was the maddest and the most modest Irishman I ever met. When he returned from his extraordinary adventures in Merv, he did not put up at

some swagger hotel in London, where he would be easily accessible to Society intent on making him the lion of a season. He lodged at a public-house in Holborn kept by a fellow-countryman of his, named Peter Cowell. This house was at the time known to the police in connection with the visits of Irish patriots of the physical force party in national politics. It was the resort of the scattered remnants of a disintegrated Fenianism.

Cowell revered his strange guest, and when customers heard the sounds of revolver practice in the upper part of the house, you may be sure that he did not give his patrons the true explanation of the noise. The fact was that O'Donovan, in bed at midday, had grown greatly annoyed at the crude art evinced in the engravings that Cowell had hung upon his walls, and that he was engaged in shooting those masterpieces into smithereens. This revolver practice in his bedroom only ceased when there was nothing breakable left to fire at. "Glory be to God!" said Peter Cowell, in relating the circumstance to a correspondent, "there's not a pictur' nor a frame nor a utinshill of anny kyoin'd that Misther O'Donovan hasn't bruk *an' ped for*!"

Two foreign gentlemen who refused to give their names, but who had some important intelligence to convey, called at my office. I signalled down that I would see them. I expected men in European garb. But the two weird creatures who shuffled into my sanctum were clothed in undressed animal skins reaching almost to their feet. They were shod in the same material. And their head-dress was also a fur so fashioned that only the eyes and nose of the individuals were visible. The curious part of the equipment was that the visitors carried pistols in their skin belts. I think that it was this little circumstance that "gave the show away." I looked very hard at the taller of the two men, and then, feeling sure in my surmise, I said cheerily:

"My dear O'Donovan, how are you? I'm delighted to see you."

"Faith, I knew you'd know me!" he declared, in a tone that entirely disguised his disappointment. "Come out and have a drink."

Now, this hospitable invitation placed me in something of a dilemma. For in the first place I did not wish to offend O'Donovan by refusing, and in the second I had no desire to walk up Fleet Street in the company of companions so strangely clad. I suggested that, if O'Donovan and his friend would go on to the "Cheese," I would follow when I had finished writing the letter on which I was then busy.

"That's a beastly picture of Dizzy," said O'Donovan quietly. He had taken his revolver from his belt, and was pointing with it to "Ape's" cartoon of Beaconsfield which hung opposite my desk.

I understood the hint. I rose and accompanied my remorseless friend. My worst anticipations were realized when I reached the office door. Quite a large crowd of Fleet Street loafers—and I think that in the Street of Adventure we could have boasted of as many loafers to the square yard as any thoroughfare in London—pressed round the door. The Fleet Street loafer is often exhilarated by the sight of strange visitors; but he had never yet seen visitors quite so strange as these. The crowd did not make any demonstration. But Cockney criticisms of the general appearance of my companions were freely bandied about. We had to cross the street and encounter the jibes of cab-drivers and omnibus cads. The crowd followed us right up to the doors of the tavern to which I had been invited. Here was another assembly. For O'Donovan had already visited the Cheshire Cheese, and had announced his intention of returning to lunch. I believe that old Moore had during that afternoon the most anxious time of his life. The fun waxed fast and furious. But there is safety in a multitude of any kind, and the intrepid traveller had so many friends and admirers in this gathering that I was soon able to slip away unnoticed.

The man who accompanied O'Donovan on this occasion was Frank Power—one of the most accomplished humbugs that ever made a way in life by means of a glib tongue, a vivid imagination, and an entire absence of scruple of any kind. O'Donovan subsequently engaged him as secretary, and he was to have accompanied his employer during the

march with Hicks Pasha. It was characteristic of Power that when the march was made Power remained behind in Khartoum. He was once mentioned in the House of Commons. A question was asked by an Irish Member as to the qualifications of Mr. Frank Power, who had contrived to get himself made British Consul at Khartoum. Mr. Gladstone, whose imagination was at times as vivid as that of Power himself, replied promptly that the gentleman in question was an "esteemed merchant" of that city.

In letters home, O'Donovan freely expressed his belief that the chances of his ever returning to England alive were extremely small. It is inconceivable that he should not have communicated this opinion to Power. That young gentleman, holding that discretion is the better part of valour, had an attack of dysentery at the very moment when his services should have—under ordinary circumstances—become of any value to his chief. He did not accompany the intrepid column that marched across the sands to inevitable and complete annihilation. As to O'Donovan, I know that he died as he would have wished to die. No survivor of that ill-fated expedition was allowed to escape with the story of the fight. But I can picture O'Donovan in the midst of the mêlée, his eyes bright with the fury of battle, his wild Irish "Whirroo!" appalling even his frantic assailants, his desperate play with revolver, his final collapse on the hot bosom of Mother Earth, his warm Irish blood reddening the sands of the African desert.

John Augustus O'Shea, of the *Standard*, was another war-correspondent who was very much given to practical joking, and disguise generally played a prominent part in his plans. On one occasion he was commissioned by his editor to describe a certain Lord Mayor's Show. Elephants were to play a part in this particular pageant; and it occurred to the accomplished correspondent that from the back of an elephant he might obtain an unrivalled view of the rivals of the route. George Sanger was providing the elephants, and O'Shea experienced no difficulty in obtaining permission to ride in a howdah and illustrate the fidelity of Indian Princes to the Empire. Sanger was also able to provide the

Oriental costume essential to the part, together with the stage diamonds without which no self-respecting Prince ever goes out elephant-riding. His face was made up to the proper tint ; his turban was a triumph of millinery ; and as O'Shea passed through Fleet Street in the character of an Eastern potentate, and in the train of a London Lord Mayor, not a soul recognized him.

Indeed, the completeness of the disguise led to some inconvenience. For when the show was at an end, and O'Shea went on his elephant to Sanger's stables in the Westminster Bridge Road, he found himself pressed for time, and unable, therefore, to abandon his disguise. He got into a hansom just as he was, and drove off to Shoe Lane to write his descriptive article for the *Evening Standard*. He was about to pass the commissionaire who stood sentry at the office door. But that old soldier did not recognize a member of the staff in the garb of a pious Hindu, and O'Shea, unable to curb his love of practical joking, soundly rated the old soldier in an improvised gibberish which the warrior, no doubt, thought he recognized as something he had been acquainted with in the East. O'Shea endeavoured to push past. The man "on the door" barred his progress. The war of strange words between them grew loud and furious. The commissionaire called to a member of the crowd that was gathering round the door to go for the police, and upstairs the sub-editor was anxiously waiting for O'Shea's copy.

Before the police could arrive Gilbert Venables came on the scene, recognized the correspondent under the disguise of the dusky Indian, and explained matters to the faithful doorkeeper. The anxiety of the sub-editor was soon appeased, and O'Shea sat down to reel off a column of humorous descriptive copy such as he alone on that staff could produce. "The Giniral"—as O'Shea was called in Fleet Street—was one of those strange men who think that it is never time to go to bed. Even when he got home in the small-hours he never felt inclined to "turn in." And as he never could do without company of some sort, he bought an owl. This bird he installed in his "study," and when

he went home in the morning he related some of the more piquant experiences of the day to the wise-looking fowl. When the owl exhibited any signs of inattention or betrayed symptoms of sleepiness, O'Shea would recall him to a sense of his responsibilities by throwing a slipper or any other handy missile at his feathered companion. As some of these missiles hit their mark, the life of the sagacious bird was neither peaceful nor protracted.

On one occasion the festive little correspondent was sent into the country to describe a two-day function, the exact nature of which I forget. On the morning of the second day another representative of the London Press gave a breakfast at his hotel to some of his colleagues. Those invited were of the swagger order of pressmen—Bernard Becker, Harry Pearse, Godfrey Turner, Edmund Yates, and some others. O'Shea heard of this social function, and, I dare say, rather resented the fact that he had not been invited. He got there, however, for in the middle of the meal O'Shea's card was brought in to the founder of the feast. The host did the only thing he could do under the circumstance: he desired the visitor to be shown in. After a few minutes something was heard rumbling along the hotel passage. The door of the sitting-room in which O'Shea's distinguished contemporaries were breakfasting was thrown open, a Bath-chair was trundled into the apartment by a couple of men, and in the Bath-chair sat O'Shea, a red Gibus on his head, a churchwarden pipe in his mouth, and on his wrists a pair of handcuffs. These he held up to us appealingly. But it suited him to pretend to be a deaf-mute, and his companions explained that the gentleman was a little mad, that they were his keepers, and that, as it was dangerous to thwart him, they were bound to accede to his request to be shown in to the present distinguished party.

O'Shea kept the game up for a long time. He resisted all efforts to induce him to appear *in propria persona* and sit down at table. He shook his head, he made queer guttural noises, and when he felt that he had entirely upset everybody he made signs to his companions to wheel him away. He was taken from the hotel to the public promenade,

and was driven up and down that select area, still in red Gibus, handcuffs, and long clay pipe, followed everywhere by an interested crowd. Eventually the police interfered, and in the afternoon "the Giniral" appeared before the scandalized breakfast-party of the morning clothed and in his right mind.

A powerful practical joke of a double-barrelled kind was played by a Fleet Street artist, and got into the papers of the time. There were two black-and-white artists in the Street of Adventure. One was H. Furniss with an "i"; the other was H. Furness with an "e." The one was an Irishman; the other was a Yorkshireman. The latter was the perpetrator of the joke. Joseph Biggar, the well-known Parliamentary obstructionist, was so unfortunate as to have been made the defendant in an action for breach of promise of marriage. What was still more unfortunate was that he lost his case, and was cast in heavy damages. Furness (with an "e") herein saw an opening. He drew a cheque for the amount of the damages incurred, and forwarded it to Jo Biggar in a letter glowing with expressions of sympathy and admiration. Biggar attributed this act of princely generosity to Furniss (with an "i"), and sent to that gentleman an acknowledgment of his great indebtedness. Meanwhile the joker had stopped his cheque at the bank, and Jo Biggar had given the correspondence—the donor's letter and his own reply—to the Press. Biggar was covered with shame, Furniss (with an "i") was aroused to indignation, and Furness (with an "e") had proved himself—as is the nature of furnaces, however spelt—to be very hot stuff.

But it was among my theatrical friends that I found the most patient, enterprising, and scientific prosecutors of humour in action. J. L. Toole was very fond of the practical joke. But he did not carry his schemes out on the generous scale that seemed the proper proportions to certain of his colleagues. His jokes were small personal affairs, never calculated to give pain or annoyance, and invariably described in some paper or another. "How *do* these things get into the papers?" Sothern was a past-master in the

fine art of practical joking. Some of his most notorious successes in that line have been narrated in works of biography or autobiography by other men. But I was a witness of two of his efforts in this way which I have never seen described in print. They indicate the time, thought, and pains, which Sothern was always prepared to spend over the elaboration of a practical joke in order that it might eventually be presented complete and perfect. He possessed a true actor's faith in efficient rehearsal.

The breakfasts of Sam Rogers, the banker-poet, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, may have been very interesting reunions ; but they could not have been half as amusing as the breakfasts of Sothern given during the closing years of that century. No one was invited to these gatherings who was not either odd or interesting or witty. The conversation was kept up to the mark by a host who could play on the faculties of his guests as a musician on the strings of an instrument.

One Sunday forenoon at Sothern's London *pied-à-terre* in Vere Street, John Maclean, of the Gaiety Theatre, was present. Maclean was what was called in those days a "useful actor." He was a wonderfully fine mimic, and was particularly good at reproducing the different shades of Irish and Scotch dialects in all their varying enormity. He used to tell a story about George Cordery, the property-master at the Theatre Royal, Dublin, and Barry Sullivan, the tragedian, which introduced admirable imitations of both those worthies. The story itself would lose most of its point by translation into cold print. It described an altercation between the tragedian and the property-master as to the correct cue for the lowering of the cauldron in "Macbeth," Cordery insisting that "filthy 'ags" was the cue, because he had been so taught by his "old mawster, Mister Phellups—an' 'e was a man as knew 'ow to play Macbeth." Sullivan insisted on the cue being, "May eternal curses light upon you!" At the last rehearsal of the Witch scene, Barry Sullivan stalked over to the trap through which the cauldron was to disappear, and called down to the property-master :

"Do you know the cue *now*, Mr. Cordery?"

"S'wulp me, Goad!" came back the voice of the exasperated George, "I shall never forget it. It's 'May eternal cusses light upon you!'—*meanin' nothing personal to you, Mr. Barry Soolivan!*"

The breakfast at an end and cigars lighted, there was always experienced a feeling of suspense and expectancy. Sothern requested Maclean to give his famous imitation of the tragedian and the property-master. After the usual amount of demur, Johnny rose to do as he had been bidden. Sothern placed his victim on the hearthrug, where, with his back to the fire, he could command the entire company, and where he was at the farthest point from the entrance to the room. The gifted imitator launched into his narrative, and soon had the assembly in a roar. But just when he had come to the height of the colloquy between the tragedian and his subordinate, the door of the room was suddenly opened, and Sothern's man announced :

"Mr. Barry Sullivan!"

The tragedian entered, bowing right and left, and shaking hands with his host.

"Go on with your recitation, Johnny!" cried Sothern.

But Maclean had collapsed and taken refuge behind the chair of a friend. Nor was he greatly reconciled to the situation when it was discovered that the new-comer was not Sullivan at all, but a brother comedian made up for the part.

Another of Sothern's practical jokes was carried out with the assistance of Sir Charles Wyndham—in those days innocent of any pretensions to the accolade. This particular experiment was six months in the working, and by the elaborate means adopted its victim was kept on the tenter-hooks of suspense during all that time. The late Mr. Edgar Bruce, then lately joined to the ranks of "the profession," was the unfortunate dupe. Bruce was an ambitious young gentleman, and the joke was so contrived as to play on this characteristic. It commenced in this way : Sothern had it put about that he had been approached by the Russian Minister on the possibility of getting together a company of English comedians to play in St. Petersburg. He personally could not accept the flattering command. He pretended

to offer it to Wyndham, and Wyndham handed the proposal on to Bruce. Bruce jumped at it, and then, and for a period of six months, the fun waxed fast and furious. Bruce was invited to meet the Minister. An old nobleman smothered in orders, but having no language but French and his native tongue, was introduced to Bruce at a luncheon given for the purpose. At that time Bruce had no French, and the conversation was carried on with Wyndham as interpreter. Preliminaries were settled. An agreement was signed. There remained nothing now but to engage a company. Here again his good friends Wyndham and Sothern came to the rescue. They made a careful selection of actors and actresses who were let into the secret.

Eventually the affair got paragraphed in the newspapers. The public was as greatly duped as Bruce himself, and those interested in theatrical matters gossiped knowingly about the visit of the English comedians to Russia. Constant devices were adopted to raise, and sometimes to dash, the hopes of the victim. Once Sothern borrowed a thousand pounds' worth of diamonds from his jeweller, and lent them to Miss Edith Chalice—one of the supposed Bruce Company—who exhibited them to the deluded victim as a gift from the Minister, asking him to name any little souvenir he would desire for himself from the same potentates. Bruce made his desires known; but that was as far as the matter ever went in that particular direction.

I was at a Bohemian party given by Val Bromley one night at his studios in Bloomsbury Square, when there was an amusing exhibition of the system adopted by Sothern and Wyndham to arouse the anxiety of poor Bruce. All three of them happened to be at this jolly function. At about one o'clock in the morning a sudden altercation broke out between Sothern and Wyndham; they stood in the middle of the studio in attitudes of menace, their voices were raised. "Never dare to speak to me again!" shouted one of the angry men. "You are a contemptible scoundrel, sir!" roared the other. The war of words grew hot, the gestures more threatening, and Bruce ran from friend to friend in the room, crying: "For Heaven's sake pacify them!"

My whole future is ruined if those two men quarrel !” He spoke with the greatest emotion, and his face was deadly pale. At length one of the disputants cried out : “ A friend of mine will wait upon you in the morning, sir !” and strode out of the room, speedily followed by his brother-conspirator. Soon after this the whole thing was “ given away ” by one or other, or by both, of the authors of the joke. But the curious part of the thing is that Edgar Bruce had for six months so convinced himself that he was a manager that he could not rid himself of the character. He had achieved the reputation. He had, moreover, made openings for himself among performers, costumiers, authors, and musicians. In six months he had gained experience of the managerial methods, and, being a manager in imagination, he crystallized into a manager in reality. His first managerial experiment was, I think, at the Royalty Theatre in Dean Street, Soho. Here he engaged as his representative in front of the house a comparatively unknown young man called Augustus Harris, little imagining that he was employing an Augustus Druriolanus in the making. He subsequently built the Lyric Theatre, and he died a comparatively rich man. The theatrical career of Edgar Bruce is the only practically good thing that I have known to result from the playing of a practical joke.

These carefully-devised experiments on a large scale, becoming known, naturally fired the ambition of imitators and a number of gabies, whose only indication of humour consisted in the fatuous smirk with which they greeted one in season and out of season, set up as professors of the game. Certain of these misguided young men formed themselves into a nomadic club called “ The Who-bodies.” But a better name for them was invented by Wallis Mackay, who lashed them unmercifully in his “ Captious Critic ” under the name of “ Theodore Hooklings.”

The humour which is not of a practical kind appears to have died away out of our literature, our legislature and our judicature alike. Nay, it is fading out of our street life with the disappearance of the omnibus cad and the driver of the hansom. Even the gamin is losing his characteristic

gaiety in the solving of puzzles in his favourite publications or in calculating the odds in turf handicaps. The last of the Parliamentary wits was Bernal Osborne. He scintillated before I entered on a journalistic career, but I well remember the stimulation which the newspaper reports of his utterances afforded me in my younger days. In contesting Waterford at a General Election, he was opposed by Sir Patrick O'Brien, a very old man whose enunciation was not of the clearest. Following the revered Baronet on the hustings, Osborne, exactly mimicking the tones of his rival, commenced: "Pity the sorrows of a poor old man whose trembling limbs have borne him to these hustings!" Then, addressing himself to one of the nasty points of the other candidate's attack, he said: "But when the honourable Baronet describes me as the rejected of seven constituencies, I hurl the accusation back in his teeth—if he has any!" In the House he was equally ready. Liskeard was among the constituencies that had rejected him. A question arising regarding that now happily disfranchised borough, it was referred to Bernal Osborne. He immediately rose and said: "I regret, sir, that I am unable to recall any particulars respecting *that highly respectable street*!" Viscount Amberley was a small, baby-faced man. When he sat in Parliament, and when Bernal Osborne was at the Admiralty, Amberley asked some inconvenient question regarding that Department. Osborne smilingly informed the House: "That is a matter which was settled when the honourable Viscount was in his—er—perambulator!"

Bernal Osborne's patronymic was Bernal. He was a Jew and the son of Mr. Ralph Bernal, who was for many years Chairman of Committees in the House of Commons. He added the name Osborne to his own on marrying Lady Osborne, with whom he did not always agree. When he married he was a dashing young officer and Aide-de-Camp to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. I suppose he was not quite so successful in the dull domestic round, for he and his wife led a cat-and-dog life. They soon separated, and during the period of this first grass-widowhood the lady wrote a novel in which her husband was depicted, under a

persuaded that in listening to the lurid romances of the General he was receiving rather more than value for his money.

The successes of the gallant General in war were only less renowned than his successes in love—that is to say, from the General's own not very lofty point of view. His intrigues were, indeed, of a somewhat squalid character, occasionally involving the professional disqualification of the "slavey" at his lodgings, and his own temporary disappearance from his Fleet Street haunts.

He was a tall, muscular, well-knit, soldierly-looking man with a cavalry moustache and big imperial. His accent was that of the Lowland Scot. On one of Ansdell's afternoons the General, "intoxicated," to use a famous phrase, "by the exuberance of his own verbosity," or from other causes, retired from the convivial circle, and stretched himself out to rest on a couch at the end of the room. While "he lay like a warrior taking his rest," some habitués of the room decorated the face of the sleeping hero with burnt cork and red paint, and when their artistic work had been effected McIver looked more like a Sioux Indian on the war-path than a Scots free-lance seeking repose. Hours afterwards he woke, and found himself in a smoking-room now filled with strangers. A loud laugh greeted his appearance when he arose—a giant refreshed. There could be no mistake that the laughter was directed against him. In his most heroic vein he demanded the cause of the company's hilarity, and was referred to the mirror that was fixed above the fireplace.

A wild Scottish whoop came from his throat. He turned on the assembly with a fierce expression and a commanding gesture. The laughter of the room broke out afresh. McIver was speechless with rage. He rushed from the place. But he was staying in the hotel at the time, and in half an hour returned in the opera-bouffe costume of a Brigadier-General in the army of a struggling nationality. He had washed the paint and charcoal from his face. He stood in the midst of the grinning assembly, and, drawing his sword, he inquired in an awful voice for the name of the perpetrator of the dastardly outrage, manifestly intent on cleaving that caitiff from helm to chine. But a fresh roar of inextinguishable

laughter greeted his challenge. In the pages of "Under Fourteen Flags" he would have fallen upon that ribald crowd, cutting the infidels down man by man. In Fleet Street such a course was inexpedient. The *beau sabreur*, casting on the mockers a glance of superb disdain, exclaimed, "Ye're a pauck o' scoundrels sheltering a coward!" and stalked from the room with the air of a tragedy king, followed by the gibes of the now irate "scoundrels."

Mr. Gladstone—the G.O.M., I mean—was accustomed to ask strange people to his breakfast-table. But no stranger guest did he ever entertain than when McIver sat with him at that meal to give the great statesman his experiences in the Balkan States. Gladstone welcomed anyone who could give him the slightest information regarding what were known in the eighties as "Bulgarian atrocities," and the Brigadier-General returned to England reputedly abounding with reliable news from that part of Europe. If Mr. Gladstone was greatly in the habit of taking his facts about the Eastern Question from authorities of the McIver kidney, it is little wonder that he led his countrymen astray when he inflamed their passions on the topic of atrocities with which he had become obsessed.

A year or two since I saw the death of the hero of the "Fourteen Flags" announced in the *Daily Telegraph*. It was followed by quite a flattering obituary notice of the deceased officer. His many deeds of valour were referred to in terms which must have made all his friends regret that the tribute should have been delayed till the man himself was no longer alive to read it.

I have quoted above the initials G.O.M. as applied to Mr. Gladstone, and standing, of course, for "Grand Old Man." Another and less reverent reading of the initials was given by one of Gladstone's most devoted supporters, Mr. Labouchere. It must have been at a time when the doctors had stopped "Henry's" cigarettes, or perhaps during one of those periods of shuffling the Ministerial cards when Labouchere felt annoyed at having his claims to office once more disregarded. Whatever the cause, to Mr. Henry Labouchere was quite rightly attributed the translation of G.O.M. into "God's only mistake!"

Another of the regular members of the Ansdell circle was Morgan Evans. Evans was as good a fellow and as sound a journalist as ever tempted fortune in the Street of Adventure. But, like many a cultured man, he drifted into the wrong line—wrong, I mean, in so far as money-making is concerned. In journalism, as in other professions, that man makes most who specializes in certain subjects. Now, the subject on which Evans had specialized was scientific dairy-farming. In this study, his friendship with Professor Duguid and other leading lights in the veterinary world was of considerable service to him. The admirable series of articles which he contributed to the *Field* created widespread interest among those for whose edification they were written, and Evans might have gone on for ever treating on that subject and cognate ones in the *Field* and other papers dealing with agriculture. Such a course meant abundance of work at special rates. But Morgan Evans was a dreamer, and preferred the position of a free-lance writing spasmodically on general topics to that of the highly paid regular contributor on scientific or semi-scientific subjects.

With a miserably insufficient capital, and possessing absolutely no business capacity, Evans founded a monthly magazine entitled *The Squire*. He did me the honour to consult me about the prospects of such a venture. When I asked and ascertained what was the amount of capital behind the proposition, I strongly advised him to desist. It appeared to me that the title was more suited to a weekly paper on the lines of the *Field*, and I believed that if he would agree to the scheme a sufficient capital could be obtained. But Evans was impatient. He would hear of anything save delay. Besides, it was evident that he wanted the organ to be his own mouthpiece and under his own individual control. And this could only be achieved by the employment of his own capital. So he brought out the *Squire*, and his friends rallied round him. H. H. S. Pearse wrote charming articles about hunting; Vero Shaw wrote with interest and authority about the dog; I believe I contributed some dramatic articles. Evans himself wrote on general literature, and Montgomerie Rankin produced the

inevitable verses. Every topic in which a country gentleman might take an interest was dealt with—except scientific dairy-farming! Evans had been fed up with that subject, and devoted himself to essays entirely detached from science of any sort. I forget who was responsible for the rather neat and appropriate title for the article dealing with the drama of the month; it was called “Partridge at the Play.”

The *Squire* lived for six months, and then fizzled out, the savings of poor old Morgan Evans having fizzled out too. He then returned to the unprofitable, but more congenial, rôle of casual contributor to the Press. During the last months of his life he did little and suffered much, and the end came mercifully and quickly. Evans was a rather short, yellow-bearded man, with a gentle voice and a most engaging smile. He hailed from the Principality, but was not at all of the type of Welshman that now affrights the imagination of the English.

An occasional visitor to Ansdell's table was A. K. Moore. At that time Moore also was among those who wielded the free-lance. Among the journals that sometimes accepted his contributions was *Punch*. But Fleet Street was a long time discovering Moore's merits. He was a graduate of Dublin University and a graduate of Oxford. He was an Irishman, he possessed a fine sense of humour, wrote a lucid, vigorous style, yet had to wait many years for a recognition of his gifts. When at last “he came into his own” by being appointed Editor of the *Morning Post*, he proved himself to possess all that his journalistic friends in Fleet Street claimed for him; but I imagine that it was a man somewhat soured by waiting who took command in the editorial sanctum of the *Post*. His duties were, however, discharged not only with fidelity, but with conspicuous ability, and the paper prospered greatly in his hands. He died in harness.

There were two artists in the Ansdell entourage. The one was Mat Stretch, the other George Cruikshank junior. Both were contributors to the comic papers. The work of Mat Stretch was at one time in great demand. He possessed a vein of humour which was quite his own, and his drawings always found a place in one or other of the humorous publications. Cruikshank had a stiff style and an ex-

he was the same sleek, obese, oleaginous charlatan of former days. On his oath he was as unctuous and specious as when off it, and quite untrammelled by its obligations.

His flight to Spain, and his suicide when his pursuers were close on his trail—these are matters of history. That which is not quite a matter of history is an incident redounding very much to the charity and humanity of Mr. Labouchere. It will be recollected, perhaps, that the exposure and flight of the traitor and forger were brought about at a conference which he had with Sala and Labouchere at the house of the latter. That which has gone unrecorded is that Labouchere charged himself with the maintenance of the dead man's children.

It was curious to note the effect of the exposure of the Pigott forgeries on the London public. The Man in the Street came out very strong on the occasion. Up to that time Parnell was a much-hated politician. But your Cockney has fine sporting instincts always, and the finest instinct of the sportsman is a love of fair-play. It was felt now that a deadly wrong had been done to the leader of the Irish people—for leader of the Irish party he never was and never pretended to be. He led the people; but he drove the party like a herd of pigs. I was on the steps of the Royal Courts when Parnell came out after the disclosure. Quite a crowd of people were assembled on the pavement. Parnell was accompanied by George Lewis. On the appearance of the lawyer and his client, quite a hearty cheer was raised. The eminent solicitor—usually so impassive—was quite evidently moved and pleased. But Parnell passed on untouched, sphinx-like, contemptuous. As far as he was concerned there might have been no demonstration, no expression of sympathy, no British public at all. Tall, gaunt, unbending, he moved on, a sad, lonely figure of a man, I thought. His, however, was the immobility that covered a very genuine sense of power.

After the divorce proceedings, which broke the rod of iron with which he had hitherto ruled his so-called Parliamentary following, had come to an end, the Irish tribune proceeded to his native country to face the thing out in the constitu-

encies. A friend of his and of mine met him on the platform at Euston Station, and, on behalf of a news association, asked him to impart something of his plans and views.

"What is there about which you particularly want to know?" asked Parnell.

"Well," said the interviewer, "my people are anxious to ascertain your present attitude with regard to Mr. Gladstone."

"Oh, the old man?" said Parnell coolly, and dropping the "grand" which usually accompanied the words. "You can tell your people, if you like, that the old man has made three mistakes with me."

"Yes," said the other eagerly.

"The first was when he put me into gaol; the second was when he let me out; and the third was when he went into business with me and thought to get the better of me."

But I have wandered some few perches from Anderton's. I return. My last visit to that hotel was with the late Dr. Tanner, a Member for Mid-Cork. His brother had committed suicide there by injecting morphia. The deceased gentleman, Dr. Lombard Tanner, was an extremely jovial and good-looking Irishman. He had got into entanglements—not of a financial, but of the *other* kind—and he saw no way out but this. I had been an intimate friend of his. But he sought advice neither from friends nor relatives. The memory for me will always remain gruesome and ineffaceable. For before the inquest the coroner's officer handed me a letter-card addressed to me by poor Lombard, which was written, as to the first part, just before he commenced the injection, and, as to the last part, ending blurred and incoherent, while the drug was taking effect. He wished me to accept his sword and certain other effects which he had left at his room, in St. James's Place, St. James's, and to bid me farewell!

This is, I confess, a sad note on which to close a chapter, but even the most jocund periods have their short sharp moments of tragedy.

CHAPTER XIII

DE MORTUIS

FLEET STREET is haunted by the ghosts of dead newspapers. At midnight they flit—in white sheets, of course—out of the doors and windows of old offices in the thoroughfare itself, and in the tributary lanes and streets and courts that flow into it. You may—if you have a good reliable imagination—catch the glimmer of their silent passage as they scurry back to their long homes. Poor sheeted dead ! once so full of life and hope and confidence, but cut down untimely, and fated to revisit the scenes of their short but well-meant labours !

When my time comes to go, I shall not be able to leave my children much money ; but I can—and will—leave them a lot of good advice. Should one of them determine to try his fortune in Fleet Street—a course which I should deplore—I would advise that devoted child of mine to keep a diary. Had I adopted this precaution, I should now be in a position to fix an exact date to every incident and anecdote related in these chronicles, and to record a hundred others which have escaped my memory. And for the purposes of this particular chapter I should be in a position to give the names, dates, and careers, of all the dead newspapers I have known during their brief stay on earth.

In the absence of any record, and having no desire to engage in research at the British Museum, I should roughly compute the number of publications started in my time and since died the death at between forty and fifty. I confine myself in this estimate to papers founded during the twenty years of my Press experience, and issues with which I had

some intimate or remote personal connection. And here permit me to give another crumb of advice to that unfortunate boy of mine who may develop journalistic leanings. I would say to him :

“ My son, when sinners entice thee to found a newspaper, be sure you do not call it after the name of a bird.”

That way disaster lies. There is ill luck in the selection. Even *Chantecler* would fail to draw the public if put on a Fleet Street publication. There is a fatality about feathers. It has happened so, perhaps, since journalists abandoned the goose-quill for the Gillott, the pencil, and the stylus. But that it *is* so there can be no manner of doubt. The smartest, breeziest, and best-written little paper of which I have any recollection was *The Owl*. It appeared only during the Parliamentary session. It was a sort of co-operative concern carried on by a group of able men in politics and Society. It came somewhat before my time, and I am shaky in my recollections of its short but brilliant career. I think Bowles fleshed his maiden sword in its columns, and Hume Williams the Elder wrote in it his “ Diary of a Disappointed Politician.” The other members of the group were persons of higher social distinction. The profits of the issue were expended on dinners at Greenwich—I wonder why people ever *did* dine at Greenwich?—and on a box at the opera. But the paper did not live, and now “ *The Owl*, for all his feathers, is a’ cold.”

The Cuckoo made its early flights with a strong pinion. It was started as an evening paper by Edmund Yates, and was frankly named after the predatory fowl because it made free with the nests of its morning contemporaries. Yet in truth it did not sin half so largely in this direction as the other evening papers, and its original matter was smart, ably written, and cheery. But who cares in these days to hear of original matter in a paper? Nowadays matter doesn’t matter. From Yates the devoted *Cuckoo* passed, by purchase, into the hands of my friend “ Jimmy ” Davis. “ Jimmy,” in his desire to make his journal spicy, lowered its tone. He was very fond of writing what he called “ snaky ” paragraphs, and too ready to accept, without making due

inquiries, items of curious information about people in Society. It was useless to reason with him on the subject. A short time before the end came I met the sub-editor in Fleet Street, evidently labouring under a stress of emotion. I asked him what was the matter.

"If we don't dry up we'll be smashed up," he replied. "Look at this! He insists on its going in!"

"He," of course, was Davis, and "it" was a paragraph dealing with the private life of a very great lady indeed. This particular item got crushed out at the last minute. But the risks of criminal libel run every day by "Jimmy" would appal the modern journalist. This notwithstanding, the *Cuckoo* died a natural death. Contrary to general expectation, it "dried up," and was not "smashed up."

The bat is not what naturalists would call a bird, but I feel sure Davis thought it was. For his second venture was a weekly publication called *The Bat*. In his earlier paper he had gone out of his way to attack Society people; in the *Bat* he found a savage delight in crucifying Stage folk. In this direction he probably went as far as any man ever *did* go without suffering from reprisals. He was less fortunate when he turned his attention to the leading men on the Turf. Lord Durham, being advised that the *Bat* had gone beyond the limits of fair criticism, took criminal proceedings. The redoubtable James, having a lawyer's notion of what the upshot would be, and a nice appreciation of the advantages of liberty, repaired to France, where he remained in exile for several years. George Lewis, indeed, boasted that as long as he (Lewis) lived Jimmy should never return to his native land. And when two Jews feel like that about each other, you may safely anticipate trouble. But Mrs. Davis brought her personal influence to bear on Lord Durham, and, the Hatton Garden threat notwithstanding, "Jimmy," who had got as far as Boulogne, was permitted to return to London—absent from which centre of activity he was never really happy.

Some few years before his death Davis founded yet another paper. This time he combined in his title his taste both for ornithology and for mythology. He called his paper

The Phoenix. He now showed his pristine smartness without his old-time scurrility. The paper was, indeed, very well done—bright, original, and mordantly humorous. But the day for that sort of thing was closing in. There was no longer any public for six-pennyworth of smartness. Seeing this, the accommodating proprietor reduced his price to two-pence; but even at that figure his smartness proved unsaleable. At the other end of the town, however, he was making money “hand over fist,” as the vulgar saying has it. His “*Floradora*” was running at a West End theatre and playing to crowded houses. I suspect that a considerable amount of the money which he made out of comic opera was lost in comic journalism. I wrote for Davis on all his papers, and although he usually owed me a balance at the moment of the inevitable “smash-up” or “dry-up,” that balance was so inconsiderable in each case, as compared with the sums that I had taken from him, that I never thought of pressing him. Davis was essentially a good “pal.” He has followed his papers and his other enterprises into the grave. May the turf lie light on him! The Turf pressed him rather heavily here.

Another bird of ill omen was *The Hawk*. This was hatched out by Augustus Moore, an Irishman very well known in the eighties on the Press, but in later years better known in connection with the stage and stage plays. Augustus Moore was the brother of George of that ilk, an author who first came into notice by means of a collection of verses, chiefly imitations of Swinburne, and called “*Pagan Poems*,” and afterwards notorious for some faithful studies of domestic servants given to the public in the guise of fiction of the Zolaesque order of literature. In his labours on the *Hawk*, Augustus Moore was greatly assisted by his compatriot and copartner, Mr. J. M. Glover, known in later days as the conductor at Drury Lane and onetime Mayor of Bexhill-on-Sea.

Moore passed through many vicissitudes in carrying on the *Hawk*, all of them encountered in that spirit of cheery optimism which characterized the adventurers of the jocund days—the boys of the Old Brigade, as Clement Scott called

them. But the financial position at last became impossible. Moore sold out his interest for a small sum, and the *Hawk* came under the control of John Chandor, an implacable enemy of Moore's, and a sort of Ishmael in his attitude with respect to society generally. Chandor's reign was brief but lurid. He hit out all round, not with the rapier, but with the bludgeon, and at last, getting into a fracas at the Aquarium with some gentlemen holding commissions in the army, he attacked these men by name in his paper. The Colonel of the regiment insisted on his officers obtaining an apology or bringing an action. No apology was forthcoming. The action was taken; heavy damages were imposed. The venomous bird of prey had made her last flight.

The Pelican may, at first sight, appear to be an exception to the rule which associates ill luck with the selection of a bird name for a paper. But, with all respect to Mr. Boyd, the *Pelican* is scarcely a paper in any large or liberal use of that term. It is a little organ owned, edited, and principally written, by one man. It has discovered a nice adjustment between the minimum of "copy" and the maximum of advertisement. But the circulation is good, and the advertisers are quite satisfied, so no one else need cavil; however, I should not advise any future promoter to attempt success on Mr. Boyd's lines, even with a good bird name to start out on.

Another bird which, having for many years suffered severely from the pip, at length died a lingering death, not greatly regretted by the public for which it fatuously "clucked," was *The Bird o' Freedom*. This weird fowl was hatched in the hot incubators of the *Sporting Times*. Its memorial tablet is now affixed, together with that of the *Man of the World*, among the titles of the parent paper. No paper has so many titles incorporated as the *Pink Un*.

"How much money should you have to start a daily newspaper?" I once asked the owner of one of our great dailies.

"Two hundred and fifty thousand pounds," he answered promptly.

Many daily papers have been started on less than that sum, and a few of them have succeeded. But my experience of Fleet Street confirms the estimate of the eminent man whom I have quoted. It is not the mere start, of course, that demands that large capital sum ; it is the income expended in keeping the thing going until it reaches the paying point that renders desirable a big capital. The best sub-edited paper that ever saw the light in London was *The Echo*. Its editing also was good. But for sub-editing it held, in its time, an easy pre-eminence. No one knows—no one ever will know—the amount of capital sunk in that venture successively by the publishers in La Belle Sauvage Yard, by Baron Grant, and by Passmore Edwards. Sanguine speculators succeeded each other in prolonging its existence. It was the very type and model of what an evening paper should be. It lived for many years. It never paid. It is one of the mysteries of the profession.

A much shorter shrift was accorded by the public—that *difficile* and insensate public !—to *The Hour*. This ambitious Tory organ was edited by Captain Hamber, who had held a corresponding post on the *Standard*. Hamber was one of the most remarkable men I ever met. He possessed some rather pronounced eccentricities ; but he was a gentleman *ad unguem*, and he had the authentic editorial *flair*. But the faith of the proprietors of the *Hour* could not have been equal to the proverbial grain of mustard-seed. For—at least, so Hamber more than once told me—they “ shut down ” on the very day on which, for the first time, the paper showed a profit. On the collapse of this Conservative venture the gallant Captain was offered the editorship of the *Morning Advertiser*. Thus he could—and did—boast of having controlled the destinies of three morning papers. He did not, however, very greatly relish his connection with the “ ‘Tiser,” as it was irreverently called by the Street. But he did his work well and conscientiously, and succeeded in what should have seemed an impossible task—that, namely, of raising the tone and increasing the influence and circulation of the organ of the British Bung.

Hamber always treated his licensed victualling proprietors.

with a sort of lordly tolerance, and they forgave his mood in return for the good fortune which had attended his conduct of their property. Indeed, they evinced the unbounded confidence they bestowed in him by always granting any advances for which he asked, for he was afflicted with a chronic need of advances. Once or twice the worthy men gave him a bonus to discharge some pressing obligations. His salary was £1,000 a year; but had it been £5,000 a year, Hamber would have contrived to get through it. To be in debt was his *métier*. Yet he was fond of lecturing members of the staff, who evinced a faculty for following his brilliant example on the folly and wickedness of the thing. Indeed, I have known him to be interrupted in the delivery of a homily of the kind by the intrusion of a Sheriff's officer charged with an ultimatum to the genial editor himself.

His handwriting was the very worst I ever attempted to make out. As a matter of fact, he could not decipher it himself. But there was one compositor in each of the offices in which he had edited who could set up his copy, though, as Hamber often said, "whether he really sets up exactly what I wrote is quite another matter. But he always swears he does, and I'm blessed if I can contradict him!" Before Captain Hamber took to journalism he had become known as having been the man who enrolled and commanded the German Legion during the Crimean War. Neither Hamber nor his Legion was ever called to the front; but it was generally admitted that in this matter he had acted promptly and patriotically. Hamber was a staunch party man, a member of the Junior Carlton Club from its foundation, and he possessed an unrivalled acquaintance with the fine art of party tactics. It is not altogether to the credit of the party that his last days should have been passed under a cloud to which there was no silver lining. He was a man physically of great proportions, but had acquired a stooping habit and unmilitary gait. And his great frame contained a heart as big as the shell that enshrined it.

The forerunner of the halfpenny dailies was *The Morning*. The one circumstance against that wonderfully well edited

paper was that it came before its time. It was founded by Mr. Chester Ives, one of the most popular and most accomplished of the American colony in London. He edited the paper himself, and surrounded himself with a really smart and reliable staff. Among other men whom he introduced was a young man from the North who afterwards became associated with the Harmsworths in the promotion of their successful newspaper undertakings. Notwithstanding the bold bid which the *Morning* made for public favour, it failed to "catch on," and we watched its disappearance with regret—but not as those without hope. Poor Chester Ives! since the above lines were penned he has passed from amongst us, and under peculiarly painful circumstances.

H. J. Byron brought out a penny rival to *Punch*, to which he gave the somewhat jejune title *Comic News*. But there was nothing at all jejune about the contents. The editor seemed to have inspired his staff with his own spirit of wild and irresponsible fun. The thing was a roar from beginning to end. The title displayed a caricature of the royal arms, with the mottoes "Dieu et mon droit" and "Honi soit qui mal y pense" riotously rendered, "Do 'em and drwaw it" and "On his walks he madly puns." It was the funniest thing ever produced, but it did not take with the many-headed. I strongly suspect that the public imagined that "H. J." was laughing *at* and not *with* them.

Two weekly organs of gossip, criticism, and politics which depended for acceptance chiefly on their cartoons were the *Tomahawk* and *Will o' the Wisp*. The former introduced to the public the bold and effective artistic work of Matt Morgan; the latter was the first to discover the abundant merits of the art of my friend John Proctor. In the literary department both papers occasionally condescended to scandal and scurrility. Morgan's cartoon entitled "A Brown Study" was resented by all decent-minded men, and both papers failed because they entirely misunderstood the tastes of those who at that time purchased weekly journals. The cartoons in both cases were of sufficient merit to keep any properly edited paper alive. But when the cartoonists

themselves were inspired by the conductors the worst happened. Both papers died the death unregretted.

How the *St. Stephen's Review* managed to struggle through its recurring financial vicissitudes is one of the unsolved mysteries of the publishing world. It was a strong Tory weekly, price sixpence, with a coloured cartoon by Tom Merry, and the one outstanding fact to its credit is that Mr. William Alison, the editor, gave Phil May his first chance. Alison has since those days discovered his journalistic *métier* in a field far removed from the arid area of politics, and in his new line he has achieved a large and financial success. I wrote a lot of copy for the *St. Stephen's Review*. But I turned it up after a while, and I have no doubt someone better qualified took my place.

A curious incident happened to me in connection with this paper. The Hon. Mrs. Whyte-Melville, widow of the novelist, had engaged as her private chaplain a wild Irish divine known as the Rev. Peter Higginson. Peter had been chaplain to Bishop Colenso, and his native impetuosity had been increased on the African veldt. Now, a paragraph had appeared in Alison's paper in which it was stated, as a matter of gossip, that Whyte-Melville's favourite cob, which had been provided an old age of ease by the deceased gentleman's will, was being daily galloped about the Thames Valley by a mad clergyman with a big red beard. A day or two after the appearance of the paragraph a gentleman answering the description of the person mentioned in connection with Whyte-Melville's cob, entered my room unannounced. He threw a copy of the paper containing the note on the table at which I was sitting.

"That manes me, an' you wrote it!" he said.

I asked him to be so good as to remove his hat and take a seat. He complied growling, and blushing, I thought, on his cheek-bones.

"Now, perhaps," I suggested suavely, "you will tell me who you are and how you got in here."

"I'm the Rivirind Pether Higginson," he answered, in a more chastened spirit, "an' I gev your boy five shilluns to let me in."

I rang the bell. My unfortunate clerk entered.

"You've got five shillings belonging to this gentleman. Give them back to him." Greatly resenting the order, the boy complied. "Now show the gentleman out!" I continued.

A letter from Peter received a month after assured me that he had discovered the writer of the offensive note, that he greatly regretted his intrusion, and that he would esteem it as a great favour if I would lunch with him on the following day at Simpson's in the Strand. I went, and had a most amusing time listening to his gasconading. He married the widow for the repose of whose husband's soul he had been engaged to pray, and I became an occasional visitor at their house at St. Margaret's-on-Thames. Peter's solicitude for my welfare was quaintly evinced on the first occasion of my dining with the newly-married couple. Just before going into the dining-room he whispered solemnly in my ear :

"Don't dhrink the clar't : it's muck !"

"If I be waspish best beware !" was the motto which appeared under the title of *The Hornet*. This smart and satirical little paper was originally launched in the wilds of Hornsey as a minor City organ. It then came into the hands of the American, Stephen Fiske. This gentleman made theatrical criticism the leading feature of his newly-acquired property. He was a great friend of Mrs. John Wood, the inimitable comedienne, and he was said to have been financed by Peabody the philanthropist. This I always took leave to doubt, because, although Fiske put plenty of brains and labour into his new purchase, it gave none of the customary signs of any considerable outlay of money. Indeed, in his hands, the *Hornet* was more or less (rather more than less) of a financial failure. Fiske returned to New York. Here he took up the post of dramatic critic on the *Spirit of the Times*, a position which he still holds, though the name of the journal has been changed to *Sports of the Times*.

Joseph Hatton then undertook to run the *Hornet*. Hatton had written a novel called "Clytie," a great part of which was made up of the proceedings in the celebrated Twiss case

lifted bodily from the columns of a daily paper. The novel enjoyed a sort of library success, and Hatton thought to increase the circulation of his new property by bringing out "Clytie" as a serial. Now, the public hates reprint, and it particularly hates reprint of unsuccessful stuff. But Hatton was obsessed by "Clytie." He not only ran it in his paper, but he turned it into a play, and as he could not find a manager willing to produce it, he took it on the road himself. That soon settled poor Jo Hatton, and incidentally involved his parting with the *Hornet*.

Under the editorship of Vero Shaw the *Hornet* exhibited all the signs of enlightened management and a desire to live up to the paper's motto. Shaw introduced new men and new features. H. J. Byron was engaged to write a serial, and he also contributed a weekly causerie entitled "Our Absurd Column." Other members of the staff were Godfrey Turner, John Augustus O'Shea, Tom Purnell, and the redoubtable Featherstonhaugh. For the first time in its varied career the paper began to hum, a circumstance attributable not only to the increased brightness of the literary department, but also to the fact that the cartoons were the work of that most gifted of caricaturists and most amiable of men, the late Alfred Bryan. One salient feature of the paper under its new control was a spicy City article in which the bucket-shops of the period were remorselessly exposed and condemned. A syndicate of City men then came forward and offered a price so substantial that the proprietor could not resist the temptation to realize. Having gained their object by purchase, the *Hornet* was put to a speedy and painless end by its new owners.

An incident delightfully characteristic of the irresponsible way in which minor journalism was carried on in the jocund days may be popped in here. I can personally vouch for the truth of it. During the last weeks of his proprietorship, and during the negotiations for sale, Hatton was away from home, and the affairs of the *Hornet* were left in the hands of Broughton, the dramatic critic. It was essential, in view of negotiations then pending, that the paper should be kept alive. Danks, the printer, whose "works" were next door

to the Argyll Rooms, suddenly refused to proceed with the printing unless his balance were paid, and the "oof bird" was particularly shy and strong on the wing just then. Broughton, though a little man, was a most loyal and determined one. By hypothecating some sleeve-links and a watch-chain, and by the skilful mancœuvring of cross cheques, a small sum of "ready" was secured. The Cesarewitch was being run that day, and the money thus secured was, on the advice of Vero Shaw, invested on Hilarious. The noble horse won at excellent odds. Danks, the printer, was appeased, the hypothecated jewellery was redeemed, the cross cheques met, and the *Hornet* saved !

James Mortimer made a long, arduous, and plucky fight of it with *Figaro*. First of all the paper appeared as a daily, and was supposed to enjoy some financial backing from the Tuileries. Eventually it settled down into a weekly. For a short period, too, it sent out a Sunday edition. But Mortimer was not one of the lucky ones. After the disappearance of *Figaro* from the face of the earth, he started the *Lantern*, and in still more recent years the *Anglo-Saxon*. His later bantlings all perished in early life owing to feeble circulation and insufficient nourishment. It is, however, with his first venture, *Figaro*, that the name of James Mortimer will always remain honourably associated. His staff on that paper was largely recruited from the Civil Service. He engaged Clement Scott, of the War Office ; Dowty ("O. P. Q. Philander Smiff"), of the Paymaster's Office ; Ernest Bendall, of the same Department ; Archer and Winterbotham. They were not only capable writers—Mortimer was wont to say—but they were reliable. "You always know where to find them when you want them," he would slyly add. Mortimer's hobby had always been chess, and to the pursuit of this stimulating science he devoted a considerable portion of a full and busy life.

Hugo Ames was, I think, the tallest man who ever adventured in Fleet Street. He is a younger brother of Captain "Ossy" Ames, who has the distinction of being the tallest man in the British Army. The career of Mr. Ames as a newspaper proprietor was brief—and disastrous. He estab-

lished a smart little paper called *The Dwarf*, to which he contributed largely himself. He also founded *Smart Society*, and he was foolishly persuaded to purchase the *Hawk*. Ames was a splendid fellow, but he got into wrong hands, and as a consequence dropped a fortune at newspaper promotion in less than two years.

. . . But I have exceeded the chapter limit which I had assigned to myself, and I have dealt with but a few of the dear—the very dear—departed papers of my day. . . . The sheeted dead press round me, gibbering and clamouring for notice. Poor ineffectual ghosts ! They are doomed still to “walk.” I have no space in which to “lay” them.

CHAPTER XIV

MY FRIENDS THE PLAYERS

NEARLY opposite the old Gaiety Theatre in the Strand stood the offices of Gaze and Co., the tourists' agents. And in the early seventies the upper part of the premises had been let to a retired old sea-dog of portly person and convivial habits called Captain Harris. This gentleman had made a somewhat extensive acquaintance among the lesser lights of the stage, the music-hall, and the newspaper world, and he had taken the upper part of the Gaze office with the view of turning it into a Bohemian club.

For a while the institution flourished greatly. It was named the Savoy Club—on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle—and by those who had not been chosen for membership it was nicknamed “the Saveloy.” A continuous conviviality was the dominant note of the establishment. The hours kept by the members were astounding. The pace, in a word, was too fast. And in a couple of years the Savoy closed its doors, the unfortunate mariner who founded it having lost in the venture the savings of a lifetime.

It was at the Savoy that I first met John Hollingshead. After the closing of his theatre he would drop in of a night, generally accompanied by one or two members of the Gaiety company. No man ever undertook the management of a playhouse with less practical knowledge of the stage than Hollingshead; no man ever conducted a theatre more successfully, and to no man is the public more indebted for the amelioration of the condition of that portion of it which patronizes the drama. Hollingshead was a man of sound common-sense, never hide-bound by tradition, and

always possessing the courage of his opinions. These were the characteristics which he brought to bear on the unknown enterprise of theatrical management. And so considerable was the success attending the application of his principles to the unfamiliar task which he had undertaken, that in the course of a few years he became known all over "the profession" by the sobriquet of "Practical John."

It is true that after a successful managerial career lasting over many years his luck deserted him, and his theatre fell into other hands, but the period of undimmed success during which he kept burning that which he called "the sacred lamp of burlesque" was one upon which he might look back with considerable satisfaction. He was in many directions a reformer. He abolished the programme fee. He refused to sublet his cloak-rooms to the harpies who at that time held an undisputed monopoly for at once incommoding and fleecing the playgoers who booked for the stalls and boxes. He was the first man in London who installed the electric light. He did not, indeed, use it as an illuminant inside his theatre—electric lighting was in its infancy, and had not as yet been tried as an indoor illuminant—but he burned a fierce, if blinking, electric globe over the main entrance to the Gaiety, and he should have the obituary honours due to the pioneer.

Gradually I became on intimate terms with Hollingshead, and remained a friend of his until his lamented death. Some millions—I am speaking by the card—had passed through his hands to actors, authors, musicians, and the rest of the vast army required to carry on the business of a successful theatre. Yet he died in somewhat straitened circumstances. His courage and his equable temper, however, did not desert him. He was a bit of a fatalist, I fancy. He spoke jauntily of being "equal to either fortune." Originally he had been on the Press. He was one of the staff of Charles Dickens on *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. He wrote for Thackeray on the *Cornhill*, and for Norman Macleod on *Good Words*. Indeed, in the sixties his work was in general demand by the magazine editors. The daily paper with which he was most intimately associated was the

Daily News, for which his particular friend Moy Thomas was dramatic critic. When he severed his connection with journalism, he characteristically observed that a journalist is like a barrel-organ—wound up to play so many tunes, and that when he has “run down” it is time for him to retire. Which, I may parenthetically mention, would have been a sad doctrine for some of us.

No figure was more familiar in the Strand, Garrick Street, and the West End than that of Hollingshead in the halcyon days of the Gaiety. His good looks, his neat attire, his silvery hair, his hat cocked a trifle on one side, his brisk walk, his cheery expression, and his generally debonair appearance, suggested even to the outsider the busy, competent, yet good-natured, man of affairs. He was an excellent talker, very fond of paradox. A utilitarian philosopher, he was a follower of Jeremy Bentham. It was difficult to gather from his views as given in conversation what his political convictions really were. I once asked him the question. He readily replied in that curious but modulated falsetto of his. “I’m a Tory Socialist,” was his answer.

The stalls of the Gaiety—more particularly the front row of the stalls—were filled with the *jeunesse dorée* of the period. These young gentlemen were each interested in the career of one of the shapely vestals who tended Hollingshead’s “sacred lamp.” A somewhat lavish display of figure was then *de rigueur* with the chorus ladies. It had not yet become the fashion for young men to marry into the chorus—so to say; but the young swells made other arrangements which—in those days—the chorus lady regarded as eminently satisfactory. So the fortunes of the chorus ebbed and flowed. I have called at the ineligible rooms of a chorus lady while she was lunching on fried liver and bacon; her hair was in curling-pins, and her principal article of attire was a far from cleanly peignoir. She has called me by endearing terms, and there was nothing in the world she would not surrender to me in return for a newspaper notice a line long. In a week’s time I have seen the same young woman drive up to the Gaiety in her own victoria, loaded with

jewels, dressed in a Parisian inspiration, and with a crop of golden hair which spoke volumes for the prolific nature of the foreign soil in which it grew. Her attitude toward myself had changed as perceptibly as had her coiffure. "Hello, old chappie!" she has cried, with an amusing affectation of high-bred hauteur.

The swagger stallites who had organized themselves into a beauty cult at the Gaiety displayed every variety of what Tennyson called "the gilded forehead of the fool." These young gentlemen were known as "mashers" (the object of their temporary devotions was known as a "mash"); as "Johnnies" and as "members of the Crutch and Toothpick Brigade." In this race for the overrated favours of the chorus lady they were often beaten by the elderly "masher"—the fatuous old *roué* of the wig, the stays, the pigments, and the unguents. In these, as in all other civil contracts, it is money that matters, after all.

If Hollingshead played burlesque as his trump card, it must be recalled, in justice to his memory, that he instituted the *matinée* in London; and that he instituted it, not as the vehicle for amateur authors who played with problems, and called the result "problem plays," but as the means of introducing to the London public (or re-introducing) the greatest living exponents of the highest examples of dramatic literature. He brought over from Paris the entire company of the House of Molière. He engaged Charles Mathews to play in a series of his memorable and delightful performances. And if I don't mistake, he gave that veteran actor the opportunity of enacting a new part in a new play, "My Awful Dad." He afforded us the opportunity of seeing Phelps in his rendering of Sir Pertinax MacSycophant in Macklin's "Man of the World," probably the finest all-round bit of acting I have even been privileged to witness.

Knowing "Practical John," I soon came to know the members of his company, the bright, particular star of which was Miss Nellie Farren. Miss Farren was the embodiment of the very spirit of burlesque. She was fun personified. And although she had the support always

of a distinguished company—it included such men as Toole, Edward Terry, Royce, and John MacLean, and such women as Constance Loseby and Kate Vaughan—the whole weight of the production seemed to fall on Nellie Farren's shoulders, and she lifted it how, and where, and when she pleased. Off the stage Miss Farren was quite as amusing as on. She had the rare gift of spontaneous humour, a fine flow of animal spirits, an unfailing good temper, the whole shot through with a certain indefinable Cockney quality which gave to everything she said its hall-mark. I do not think I ever spent more enjoyable afternoons than on those Sundays when Miss Farren was at home to her friends at Sunbury. She had bought two cottages near the gates of Kempton Park, and had them knocked into one. And here, on Sundays, the merry little *châtelaine* received her friends. And some very jovial gatherings we had on those Sunbury sabbaths. The outstanding characteristic of the average actress when off the stage is an obvious artificiality. The charm of the Farren's society was in her frank naturalness, her ingenuous honesty.

Nellie Farren was the wife of Robert Soutar, the stage-manager of the Gaiety, a comic actor of limited range, and the author of some popular farces. An extremely convivial soul when off the stage, he was regarded as a martinet while on it, and during the entire period of his stage-management hardly a day passed without a rehearsal being called on some pretence or another. For this reason he was highly disapproved of by the chorus, toward the members of which his sentiments were sometimes conveyed with brutal directness. "It's the only sort of language they understand," he once said to me. Perhaps he was right, although the polished shafts of Byron's irony often went home quite as surely. I have known a girl at rehearsal burst into tears under the suavely-spoken sarcasm of Byron, and I once received a letter of complaint from a member of a chorus illustrating one of his burlesques, in which the talented author of "Our Boys" was described as "a nasty, sneerin' beast."

The inauguration of the old Gaiety and the passing of it, roughly speaking, cover the period of my own experience

of the London stage and its interesting entourage, which must be my excuse for according to my memories of the Gaiety what may seem to be an undue space.

If anyone were to ask me who, in my experience, was the most mirth-provoking actor I had ever seen, I should, without the least hesitation, mention a name which is quite unknown to the playgoers of this generation, and is being rapidly forgotten by those who belong to the last. And the name that I should mention would be that of John Sleeper Clarke. The house at which he originally appeared was the little Strand Theatre, merrily associated with the burlesques of the Brouchs and Byron, and subsequently with the less artless productions of H. B. Farnie, in which so much laughter was made for the public by Marius and Edward Terry, and that plump, inimitable Angelina Claude. J. S. Clarke was an American, and, although he appeared with great success in some of our dramatic master-pieces—he was the finest Bob Acres and the best Dr. Pangloss of his day—he preferred to enact characters written for him in pieces of which he held the copyright.

Clarke's favourite characters were Major Wellington De Boots and Toodles. It is always a hopeless task to attempt to convey to those who have not witnessed it the effect of a comic performance on the observer. It would not be correct to describe Clarke as an "eccentric" actor. His thoroughly artistic and masterly impersonation of Bob Acres and Dr. Pangloss quite forbid any hasty generalization of the kind. It would be more just to say that he selected eccentric characters for representation, and in the illustration of these characters he employed for all they were worth certain quaint methods of voice, expression, gesture, and gait which were quite his own. The pieces in which he introduced himself as an irresponsible eccentric were as a rule flimsy compositions, entirely negligible from a literary and dramatic point of view. But in the mouth of Clarke the inanities of the dramatist became precious gems. He would utter an author's commonplace with such an air of comic gravity—if I may use the expression—with such an inimitable facial note of enjoyment in the delivery, that the

little house in the Strand would rock with laughter over sayings which in cold print would appear to be the veriest drivel.

There must be many men about town who retain a vivid recollection of Clarke's acting. They will bear me out as to the statement just made. They will remember how their sides shook as Clarke in "De Boots" made the entirely empty declaration: "My dear Felix, I call you Felix because you are my best friend!" What an extraordinary quality of irresistible humour he imparted to that absurdly puerile line! Again, what a weight and world of dramatic humour he imposed on the trifling sentence addressed to the pump in "Toodles"! The scene is one in which he depicts a man imperfectly sober. Stumbling about a yard, he knocks against the pump. He grasps the handle, shakes it heartily up and down, exclaiming the while, "Excuse me, my friend—er—will you take anything?" Banal to a degree, I quite admit. But Lord! how often have I roared over the words, and to how many of my own day who read this page do they not recall an ineffaceable and delightful recollection—an they would but acknowledge it.

I hate to apply the money test as a standard by which to measure the value of artistic work. In many instances it is no test at all. The artistic charlatan sometimes amasses a fortune. But this does not hold so literally with the actor who has to appeal in person to patrons drawn from all classes of society. In his case the making of a fortune must surely be a reliable test of the possession of the real sort of genius. Clarke in a very few years in London made a fortune, purchased the lease of the Haymarket, and retired from his profession into private life without any formal leave-taking. Years after I first roared over his impersonations, I was introduced to him in a little hotel in one of the streets—Surrey Street, or another—close to the old Strand Theatre. Here the merry-maker was in the habit of sitting alone. He was the most moody, melancholy, shy, and reticent person with whom I had up to that time become acquainted. There was no slightest trace of the spontaneous, irrepressible, and irresistible fun which

seemed to possess him when he made his welcome entrances on the stage. I met him many times afterwards. I made a point of meeting him. The desire to understand the problem presented obsessed me. But I found him always the same—polite in a grave way, willing to converse to the extent of answering a question or passing a shy opinion when it was challenged. But he made no jokes, told no anecdotes, indulged in no reminiscence. Others who knew him told me the same tale of him. In the roaring Strand John Sleeper Clarke was as much a recluse as though he lived in a hut in the depths of a forest.

Reticence is not usually the characteristic note of the actor. Of all the companionships that I formed during my Press experiences, none were so enjoyable as those I made on the stage. There are, of course, some pompous asses among them. But you will find these in all callings. And the pompous mummer was never the most successful one. As a rule, the more distinguished and gifted the actor, the more genial and accessible he is. The players are full of amusing early experiences, which they relate with delightful candour. Actors' stories are, as a rule, well told, and are worth telling. Nor is this extraordinary. Making points off the stage should be very good practice for making points on it. There were two classes of raconteur in my day. The one was the reminiscent or quasi-historical man; the other was the simple retailer of good stories. Of the former class the two finest examples were John Ryder and John Coleman. Of the latter were Lionel Brough and Arthur Williams. I should not have used the past tense in alluding to Arthur Williams, who, I am happy to know, is alive and well, and still entertaining a public in whose smiles he has basked for many years.

My first introduction to Lionel Brough—"Lal," as he was always affectionately called—was at Covent Garden, where he was stage-manager during the career of that costly experiment "Babil and Bijou." The late Lord Londesborough was a determined supporter of the stage, a great friend of actors—and actresses—and a generous contributor to theatrical charities. His lordship financed the Covent Garden Opera

House when it was taken by Miss Fowler. Boucicault did the play—a sort of pantomime, we should call it to-day—with processions, and ballets, and comic relief, and popular songs, and all the rest of it. There was an army of Amazons, headed by the statuesque Helen Barry, who had started her artistic career in a cigar-shop in Piccadilly. The armour of these ladies cost no end of money, being very beautiful and substantial. A few weeks since I met a manager—a provincial manager—in the North who informed me that some of the properties and armour made for “Babil and Bijou” were being taken round the country by fifth-rate travelling companies to this day.

But to get back to “Lal” and his stories. The majority of these were, I have every reason to believe, “made up” by Brough. Everything was in the telling. One of them occurs to me now. A certain young married couple had been rendered very unhappy by the betting habits of the husband. They had an only boy of some seven summers. They were in debt all over the place. The servant had been discharged. There was little food in the house. At this tragic juncture a cheque for forty pounds arrived. The relieved and delighted husband embraced his wife and hurried off to the city to “melt” the cheque, promising to return immediately, settle all outstanding accounts, and take the family out to dinner. There was racing at Kempton that day, and the unfortunate man knew of one or two “certs.” So when he had received the proceeds of the cheque, he ran down to Kempton Park, fired with the benevolent idea of doubling, or even quadrupling, his forty pounds. The usual thing happened. Far from winning, he dropped every sou, and returned home a sad, despairing man. He hoped for sympathy from his wife; but, for the first time in their married existence, the wife rose to the occasion, and, in unmistakable terms, denounced her stricken and shame-faced spouse. He slunk from the room, and silently closed the door behind him. She heard him mount the stairs. But her heart was hardened against him. Ten minutes after the exit of the gambler her little golden-haired blue-eyed boy dashed into the room.

"Oh, mummy!" he cried, in his eager, happy way, "daddy's cut hisself shavin'."

"H-h-h-has he cut himself much?" asked the woman, rising.

"Cut hisself much!" exclaimed the innocent child; "he's cut his bally head off!"

Brough used to tell another story in which the same note of exaggeration was the salient characteristic. It had to do with a Scotsman and a kilt, and afforded a sort of current phrase in his clubs for a time. The quoted phrase was: "I'm a maun o' few wor-r-r-ds!" The story is not of the kind that can easily be conveyed in cold print.

Some years before his death I went into the Eccentric Club with him. There had been a considerable making of theatrical knights at or about the time; and when we entered the club-room, we found a smart young journalist of the new school inveighing against the knighting of stage folk. Brough, who did not care a red cent one way or the other, but who felt himself bound to stick up for his order, asked:

"But why should not actors be made knights?"

"Because," answered the adolescent Fleet Streeter, with professional glibness, "they belong to a wandering, a nomadic, race."

"Sort of Arabian knights, I suppose," suggested Brough, closing the discussion with the acquiescent ridicule that kills.

"Lal" Brough and John L. Toole were the especial favourites of Londesborough among the players, and they might frequently be seen on his drag—his lordship was an accomplished "whip"—driving down to race-meetings near London, or enjoying in his company the beauties of Scarborough.

Another indomitable patron of the stage in the seventies and eighties was the Duke of Beaufort. His Grace was particularly quick in discovering budding talent in pretty actresses. To his fostering care was due the great advance which Miss Connie Gilchrist made in an education outside the meagre accomplishments demanded in an actress of

burlesque—an education which fitted her for taking that high place in Society which she was destined to fill. Ah, dear me! it seems but a little while ago since the Duke was giving those luncheons in the upper room at Rule's in Maiden Lane, at which the time passed for all of us so quickly and so gaily. Yet how few of those who sat at the board have survived to tell the tale!

In a public-house kept by one Beck in that part of the Strand which backed on to Holywell Street, and has disappeared under the advance of the County Council improvements, there was established a small club of actors and journalists, called the Unity Club. This was a coterie to which admission was not quite so easy as its surroundings might suggest. The talk there was excellent because, I think, there were always a sufficient number of butts upon which to exercise the ingenuity of the wits. It was in this select assembly that George R. Sims was first enabled to give a taste of his quality. His butt-in-ordinary was a very boastful actor named Harcourt, and the verses—chiefly in parody of great poets—which Sims wrote on one of Harcourt's big boasts will still be recalled by those who were privileged to read one of the few copies printed. The "house-dinner" at the Unity Club was one of the most enjoyable feasts to which I ever sat down. The fare, indeed, was plain and substantial, but the sauce provided by the cheery players and pressmen who sat round the table was the most piquant to be obtained in all London.

At the Unity might sometimes be met David James and Tom Thorne, of the Strand Theatre. The club was just opposite to the theatre. When James and Thorne left the Strand, and, in partnership with Harry Montague, took the Vaudeville, a great amount of public interest was displayed in the venture. The new managers relied on burlesque as an opening experiment, preceded by comedy. The comedy was provided by Andrew Halliday. I forget who wrote the burlesque—Byron, perhaps. But the fortunes of the managers were to be founded by the new work of a new man, and the two burlesque actors from the House of Swanborough were to be enabled to rely thereafter on

comedy, and to dispense entirely with burlesque. The new author was James Albery; the new play, "Two Roses." For this production the services of Henry Irving were engaged—an engagement which evinced considerable managerial discretion, and, incidentally, gave Irving his first real opportunity of making a hit with the London public. All the members of the managerial triumvirate were provided with strong parts. George Honey gave a memorable impersonation of a good-hearted bagman—the "Our Mr. Jenkins" of the bills. Some of his lines were delivered with great unction. He comes under the influence of his wife's religious belief, and evolves into what he calls "a shining light." He and his wife are encountered by the heroine of the play.

"How do you do, Mr. Jenkins—or perhaps I should ask, how do you shine?"

"With the mild effulgence of the glow-worm," is the answer of Our Mr. Jenkins.

"We are all worms," interpolates his wife.

"Yes, my dear; *but we don't all glow*," was the answer, given by Honey with a half-deprecatory, half exultant expression that was simply inimitable and delightful.

But the Digby Grand of Irving was, after all said and done, the gem of the production. In all his after-life he never surpassed it. Only once did he equal it. I have seen Irving in every impersonation he gave in London, and I shall always hold that he reached high-water mark with the selfish swell of "Two Roses," and that he touched that mark for the second time with Matthias in "The Bells."

Albery's "Two Roses" was succeeded by a comedy from the same author called "Apple-Blossoms." It was not a success. Nor, indeed, did Albery ever produce another play to equal his first. I came to know him well; collaborated with him in a small way; and visited him when he was living at Evans's Hotel, and after he had furnished some pleasant chambers in Southampton Street, Bloomsbury. He was an admirable talker, a splendid listener, and possessed a pretty turn for unexpected epigram. The Suffragette existed in those remote days. But she prac-

tised under another name. And the questions of Woman's Rights and Female Emancipation were argued as warmly then as now. The subject came up on one occasion at Albery's rooms. His visitors were taking sides. One strong believer in tradition took his stand on Genesis, and asserted woman's inferiority on Scriptural grounds.

"Woman was made out of the rib of Man," he declared.

"And was thus a mere side-issue of creation," suggested Albery.

Albery ended sadly. He became addicted to a habit which ruined a good many of the best fellows of a convivial period. His great gifts were wasted entirely in conversational sallies, and among boon companions at the Savage Club and other Bohemian resorts. He had married a lady who subsequently "went on the stage," and greatly succeeded in her vocation, becoming one of the most popular actresses of her time and of our own. A story of the days of Albery's decadence has come to me. Some time before his lamented death, and in a contrite mood, he called his wife to his bedside, and said :

"Ah, my dear, you should have married a different man !"

"I *did*, Jim," was the tearful reply.

And there, I think, we plumb the very deeps of pathos.

It would be, however, an endless, exhausting, and uninteresting task to pursue my friends the players through their various theatres. The easier way is to catch them during their hours of relaxation in their clubs and in their pubs. The billiard-room of the Junior Garrick between half-past eleven at night and two in the morning was a covert always successfully drawn by those in search of theatrical game. Pool and pyramids were the games most in vogue, but more especially pool. Here you were sure of encountering "Jimmy" Fernandez (I never knew an actor, however sedate and inaccessible, who, being christened "James," was not called "Jimmy" by his confrères), a devoted exponent with the cue ; H. B. Farnie was rarely absent. He was a great hulking Scotsman with a slight limp, of which he hated to be reminded. He had originally

been a medical student at Edinburgh. John Clarke, of the Adelphi—no relation to John Sleeper Clarke—was another of this coterie. He was a fine comic and character actor. He was the husband of Miss Furtado, a favourite Adelphi actress of the time. He played with unvarying success under many managements, including that of the Bancrofts, was of a grumbling disposition, and was known as *Lame Clarke*, to distinguish him from the other John Clarke—Sleeper of that ilk—lower down the Strand.

Clarence Holt, the tragedian, greatly fancied himself at the game of billiards, and had succeeded in cutting more billiard-cloths than any man living. Clarence Holt (his real name was Jo) was a barn-stormer of the old school; and although in general conversation he scowled, and made use of weird expletives, he was as good-hearted a fellow as ever lived. At the Saturday house-dinners of the club he invariably gave a recitation of "The Old Clock on the Stairs," and always accepted with a sort of condescending and regal dignity the ironical cheers which it invariably evoked. His mingling of oaths with endearing epithets was one of the quaintest things in the world.

"How is Miss Holt?" one would ask.

"Oh, the dear, darling, bally little idiot—she's well, dear boy, well!"

James and Thorne were also habitués of the billiard-room of the "J.G.," as it was affectionately called by its members. And, indeed, in the stifling atmosphere of that room, which was situated in the upper part of the house, you would meet from time to time one half the actors in town. It was the favourite resort of the Swanboroughs, and of many others whose names have escaped my memory. In the Savage Club there was no billiard-room, but there was always a good attendance of actors after the closing of the theatres. The Garrick itself was never an actors' club in the exclusive sense of the word. One or two of the upper crust of the "profession" always belong to it, to justify and perpetuate the use of the title. But to the rank and file of the calling it stands in the relation of Paradise to the Peri. So that, beyond the Junior Garrick

and the Savage, the noble army of actors had no clubs. Their usual meeting-places, therefore, became pubs. And these seemed to be selected with a view to obtaining the utmost discomfort conceivable combined with the highest scale of charges possible. Thus, in the seventies the chief meeting-place of the theatrical fraternity was a wine-bar in Russell Street, Covent Garden, next door to the "Hummums," and occupying a site now covered by a market tavern. From one to four o'clock of an afternoon the wine-bar at Rockley's was crammed with all sorts and conditions of stage folk, and their contributory artistic aids—managers, costumiers, authors, artists, journalists.

About half a dozen times in my life did I visit Rockley's, but I retain the most vivid recollection of the close atmosphere, the mingled smell of sawdust and port, the loud buzz of conversation, and the frequent laugh that followed the last new story or the smartly uttered retort. It will suffice here to record the impression of a single visit. The little man standing close to the bar, the centre of an eager group intent on his poignant utterance, is Shiel Barry. Barry was an Irishman, an actor of extraordinary intensity, and a man of considerable general knowledge. He was an omnivorous reader, and, when I first knew him, a great admirer of Carlyle, some passages of whose "French Revolution" he recited with a wonderfully lurid effect. I have recorded elsewhere in this book my impression of his masterly interpretation of the part of the miser in "Les Cloches de Corneville." His rendering of certain of the characters in Dion Boucicault's Irish plays was equally memorable and impressive. He was a master of pathos and ferocity, and could at once attract or repel by the strange realism of his embodiment of either emotion. The flamboyant gentleman with the Louis-Napoleonic moustache is William Holland, of the Surrey Theatre, the North Woolwich Gardens, the Circus at Covent Garden, and finally manager of the Corporation's amusements at Blackpool, which became this particular Napoleon's St. Helena. Conversing with him is Dr. Joseph Pope, familiarly known as "Jo," and nicknamed "Jope." Dr. Pope had been a

surgeon in the army, serving in the Royal Artillery. He was a brother of Mr. Sam Pope, Q.C., of the Parliamentary Bar. Jo had been celebrated as the fattest man in the army, and Sam was distinguished as the fattest man at the Bar. Sam was a bachelor making an enormous income. Jo was a bachelor living on his half-pay; and it used to be said, that when Jo was in need of a remittance wherewithal to set right his balance at Cox's, he would apply to Sam. If Sam proved irresponsive, Jo at once threatened to go on to the music-hall stage. That always "fetched" Sam, who hated the Bohemianism in which Jo wallowed.

William Brunton discusses costume designs with Alias, and Harry S. Leigh hums a new lyric which he has composed for a production at the Alhambra. Brunton, espying me, edges through the crowd to me.

"Have you heard George Hodder's *non sequitur*?" he asks.

"No. What was it?"

"George was sent down to Stony Stratford by the *Daily News*. When he woke up in the morning, he had forgotten the name of the place. He rang the bell, and desired the chambermaid to send 'boots' to him. When that menial appeared, George asked: 'Wh-wh-what's the n-name of this p-place?' 'Stony Stratford,' answered 'boots.' 'Ah!' said Hodder, 'you may well c-call it Stony Stratford—for I never was so b-b-bitten with bugs in the whole course of my l-l-life!'"

Rockley's was at best a cramped and pestiferous inferno, ill ventilated, and without a chair to sit down on. But its customers made long stays, notwithstanding, and I understood that a considerable amount of theatrical business was done on the premises. It was a sort of rialto of the "profession." From Rockley's, the actor and those who do business with him migrated to the new Gaiety bar opened in the Strand. This was a horseshoe-shaped bar next door to the theatre, much patronized by the Brothers Mansell, by Henry Herman, by the then unknown D'Oyly Carte, by several of the Nationalist Members of Parliament, and by many of the shapely members of the chorus from

burlesque theatres in the immediate vicinity. It was leased by one "Bill" Bayliss, who in after-years, and during the Beaufort period, conducted Rule's, in Maiden Lane. For some years the Gaiety bar remained a great afternoon centre for the actors—particularly those who happened to be out of an engagement and to retain an expensive thirst. During a Gaiety *entr'acte* I have smoked a cigarette in the place, but regret that I have had no great personal acquaintance with it. Its history for ten or twelve years from its opening would be well worth writing by a man possessing the requisite qualifications.

It was the last public-house meeting-place of stage people. There are clubs now to suit every grade of actor. And chorus girls are no more seen in bars. They affect the swagger restaurants—and I, for one, cannot blame them. A greater propriety in attire is observed by the actor of to-day. He no longer affects a Quartier Latin Bohemianism. He takes himself quite seriously as a social unit. And with reason. For just as every citizen of the United States is a possible President, so is every actor a possible Knight, and every actress a possible "my lady."

To record the number of my theatrical acquaintances, and my recollections, pleasant and unpleasant, of our for-gathering, would fill many chapters. The foregoing stray notes on my friends the players are remarkable for the omission of many names which I recall with the most lively sentiments of gratitude for many a dull hour enlivened, and for many a joyous moment heightened and prolonged.

CHAPTER XV

"THE 'ALLS"

To the patrons of the music-halls of my early days about town, and to the performers in them, those places of entertainment were never known as "halls," but always as "'alls." Nothing should more eloquently indicate the vast change that has taken place in their administration. In those days the "'alls" were held in general disrepute. To-day their repute in the land is sweet and sound. They have, indeed, ceased to be halls; they have become palaces. And they have evidently come to stay, always widening their sphere of influence, and proving, as time goes on, an increasing source of anxiety to those who have invested their capital in playhouses.

For the evolution of the theatre has been very gradual. No great departure has been made on the boards since the playgoer was taught to demand accuracy of detail in staging. That was effected by the Bancrofts in the sixties. Managers have since their day "gone one better" in the cost of a production, in the gorgeousness of scenery and properties, in the numerical force of their stage crowds. But nothing since their production has been more appropriately acted and staged than the Robertson series of comedies. And no reproduction—whatever it may have cost—has proved an artistic advance on the Bancroft presentation of the "School for Scandal." We have better theatres, and we have more of them. The comfort of the auditorium has been immeasurably increased. The space devoted to the stage by our newspapers has quadrupled. The playgoing public has grown enormously. But the playgoer has been

marking time all the while. And the dramatist, in this particular respect, has been following the brilliant example of the playgoer.

But if the drama has ceased to show itself progressive, if, according to some, it even exhibits symptoms of decadence, the evolution of the music-hall has been that of recovery, progress, and reform. The music hall has risen “on stepping-stones of its dead self to higher things.” And only those who can recall the utter unloveliness of that “dead self” can properly appreciate the privileges accorded to the patrons of the halls and palaces as they are conducted in this present year of grace.

To begin with, no woman of the period with which I am dealing, with any regard for her reputation, would think of entering one of these places of entertainment. She would run the inevitable risk of being affronted by the patrons of the hall, and being outraged by the words and gestures of the performers on the stage. Phryne swarmed in the auditorium—poor soul!—and by the bars lounged or swaggered the shameless males, Jew and Gentile of his kind, who lived on the exploitation of female beauty. The smaller halls, such as the Pavilion (it was a small hall in those days); the Trocadero, which rose on the ruins of the Argyll Rooms, and was run by old Bob Bignell; the Oxford in Oxford Street; and Weston’s in Holborn—all were hot, ill-ventilated, and stuffy interiors; and the moral atmosphere was as warm as the physical.

Having once got his customer more or less comfortably seated, or propped up close to a bar, inside his “’all,” the main object of the proprietor was to induce him to drink as much as possible of very bad wine and spirits at positively fancy prices. Phryne, always hovering near, exhibited a nice solicitude in forwarding the proprietor’s views in this direction. The waiters, during the frequent “waits,” made a descent on the stalls, and, forcing their legs through the exiguous spaces, contributed largely to our discomfort. I recall the revenge of a friend of mine on a waiter who had forced himself past us for the fourth time. My friend was a Newmarket man, and was up in London for the Epsom

Spring Meeting. A whisky-and-soda stood on the little ledge in front of him. As the waiter crushed past, my friend very neatly tipped his glass over on to the floor. The glass fell shivered, the waiter turned round, my friend denounced him for his clumsiness and demanded that his glass should be replenished. The waiter protested. But the manager of the "all" decided against his menial. A fresh drink and a new glass were provided, and not again during the course of that evening did the waiter attempt to brush past our stalls. Not quite honest on the part of my friend? Perhaps not; but it was quite effective, and, under the circumstances, what would you?

Originally the "all" was merely an annexe to a big public-house. The thing commenced in "harmonic clubs," "free-and-easies," and the like, and many of the customs and traditions of the "free-and-easy" persisted for a long time under the altered condition of things. Thus, the programme was, as yet, an unknown document, and the singers were introduced by a bibulous person who sat on an elevated arm-chair with his back to the stage, and his eye roving over the house. To this day I never can quite make out to what class of society the individuals belonged who sat round the chairman's table. They must have had money, for cigars and brandies-and-soda, and even that champagne which was innocent of grape, were consumed at their expense. An indifferent, honest crowd, no doubt. Sharks, exploiters, billiard-markers, sporting touts, reinforced from time to time by a contingent of moneyed "mugs."

At the "Mogul" in Drury Lane—afterwards known as the "Middlesex"—presided nightly the king, emperor, titular chief, of chairmen. This was a man named Fox. His face, encrimsoned by potations long and deep, was large, and beamed with good-nature. His nose was immense and pendulous—more a proboscis than a mere nose. But the boys in the gallery—a rough lot they were—took old Fox very seriously indeed. And it was quite amazing to witness the way in which, by merely rising and calling upon some delinquent by name, he could quell an incipient riot among "the gods." Thieves and their trulls, the scourings of

Drury Lane tributaries, and the lawless denizens of the turnings off the " Dials "—they were quelled by the menace in his eye, and trembled at the deep bass of his commanding voice. Fox once sat to an artist friend of mine, and the resulting picture was the very best Bardolph I have ever seen on canvas.

When I was a young man " seeing life "—ay, and tasting it, too, for that matter—I admit having gained some experiences that I would quite gladly have missed. It is inevitable that the memory will be charged with a reminiscence which is recalled with disgust, and that many of the so-called pleasures of youth leave a nasty taste in the mouth which is never entirely displaced. The " star comique " is one of those memories. George Leybourne was not at his zenith when I first saw him. He had essayed to live the life which he was supposed to depict on the stage—with the usual result. But he still held the first claim on the music-hall public. It is another circumstance marking the complete and rapid evolution of the music-hall to note that forty years ago George Leybourne held the same position with the patrons of these establishments as was afterwards held by Chevalier and Leno, and is at the present time of writing held by Harry Lauder.

Leybourne was still singing " Champagne Charlie is my Name " when I heard him, and the amusing sight was nightly afforded of lawyers' clerks from Lincoln's Inn, and shop-boys from Islington, and young men-about-town on twenty-five shillings a week, waving their mugs of beer or " goes " of whisky, and madly joining in the exhilarating chorus as though champagne was their daily beverage. But it was not to join in his bacchanalian choruses that the greater part of the audience crowded to hear Leybourne's songs. The " star comique " was ever provided with offal for the pigs in front. And it was when the orchestra began on the opening bar of ditties like, " Oh, why did she leave her Jeremiah ? " that necks were craned and ears set. For the pornographic part of the show was now " on." The words of the song itself did not offend save by reason of their inanity. But between the verses the singer introduced long monologues

known to music-hall bards as something "spoken." It was in these "spoken" interpolations that Leybourne "let himself go." He cheerily set out to discover how far a pornographic artist could proceed with a music-hall audience. Sometimes he played with suggestion and innuendo. But properly encouraged and liberally stimulated, he would spurt filth from his mouth as a juggler emits flames from the same orifice. The more reckless he became, the more delighted grew his audiences. That was Leybourne as I remember him. And Leybourne was typical of the music-hall as it then was.

Off the stage poor George was a good-natured, light-hearted, generous, and conceited fellow—the friend of bookmakers, Cockney sportsmen, publicans, and sinners; and the model of the mere middle-class boy in offices, who imitated his dress and peculiarities, and regarded him as the mirror of Society. The great man drove from hall to hall in a little carriage drawn by a pair of wonderfully neat ponies. The champagne of his evening ditties became the usual tippie of the artist during his afternoon calls at his favourite bars. He drank, indeed, many of the sweets of artistic success—adulation, flattery, the favour of women, and the jealousy of men. He lived hard and died hard-up. For even in his time the shadow of a change was visible, though it was no bigger than a man's hand.

Other music-hall artists there were who, however disinclined they might feel in the matter, were obliged to follow in the wake of the "star comique." Arthur Lloyd was a genuine humorist, and had a peculiar velvety quality of voice, which was conspicuous by its absence in the throats of his contemporaries. As an artist he was incomparably the most accomplished, and the most versatile of the music-hall men of his time. But though he got hold of some songs that enjoyed a wide and long popularity, he never made one of those sensational "hits" which have accidentally come in the way of less-accomplished performers. "The Great Vance" was another of the music-hall favourites. This wonderfully overrated person belonged to the Leybourne school of thought, and illustrated the swell of the period as accurately as was possible by a man whose aspirates were

scarcely on a level with his aspirations. " The Great Macdermott " came a little later than the trio whom I have named, but was long singing on the same stage as Lloyd and Vance, the popularity of both of whom he was destined to eclipse.

Macdermott had been a sailor in the Royal Navy. I remember his giving me on one occasion a most dramatic account of how he came to leave the service. The general details I forget. But there is impressed on my memory the picture of Macdermott being rowed ashore in a jolly-boat, rising in the stern-sheets, and, shaking his fist at his ship, exclaiming : " Her Majesty's Navy, adoo !" In the fo'castle there is a constant demand for the very class of song which was finding so much favour at the hands of the groundlings when this songster took to the stage. And as a follower of poor Leybourne, the sailor-man-turned-comedian made his first efforts. He was minded if he could to " go one better " than the creator of " Champagne Charlie." But that wonderful impersonator had already sounded the depths. Macdermott, however, soon asserted his claim to a second place with such compositions as " Moses and Aaron sat on a rock." These essays in an equivocal genre brought the singer quickly to the front. Yet it was not as an illustrator of pornographic minstrelsy that Macdermott was to make his " hit." When that wave of patriotism which its detractors called " Jingoism " swept the country, Macdermott was to the fore as the laureate and bard of the patriots.

Macdermott, indeed, has enriched the dictionaries of more nations than one with a new word. That is the word " Jingoism," as used in politics. He sang a chorus in which we hurled defiance at the wide world, and soon the wide world was singing it, too. Macdermott had a wonderfully distinct enunciation, and had a peculiar knack of emphasizing the initial letter of every word he sang. The chorus which created the furore, as sung by the great man, went in this way :

" We Don't Want To Fight ;
But By JINGO If We Do,
We've Got The Ships, We've Got The Men,
We've Got The Money, Too !"

While this ditty was the vogue, the Great Macdermott firmly believed that he and Lord Beaconsfield were the two principal Conservative forces of the day. With the capital he made out of his patriotism he retired from the music-hall stage. Unkind rivals declared that his patriotic howling had cracked his voice. He set up a "Music-Hall Agency" in the Waterloo Bridge Road, and joined the redoubtable Jack Coney in "making a book." History holds no further record of him and his deeds.

About the same time James Fawn, Herbert Campbell, and Charles Coborn, began to demonstrate to the public—and this fixes their place in the elusive story of the evolution of the music-hall—that it is possible to have a song in which there shall be real humour, the nice delineation, a "taking" tune, without any appeal to that which is lowest and most bestial in the minds of the public. Then followed Chevalier. Dan Leno, and the comic singers of the present day, with whom, of course, these reminiscences have nothing to do.

Perhaps the most deplorable feature in the entertainments given by music-hall managers in the early days of my acquaintanceship with those places of entertainment was the lady performer. Those terrible young (or middle-aged) persons who were announced as the "Sisters" So-and-So, and were inevitable on every stage, always succeeded in putting a portion of the audience into a bad temper. Their short coloured skirts, their fixed smirk, the mechanical steps of their dance, their metallic voices—these things have left an impression not pleasant to recall. They couldn't sing. They couldn't dance. And their "make-up" proved that they couldn't even paint. Still, there were women appearing before the patrons of the "'alls" who possessed the authentic gift. One of the earliest of these was Jenny Hill. "The Vital Spark" they used to call her on the bills.

In her choice of subject she allowed herself a wide range, alternating between the pathetic and the humorous. She was very clever in depicting the coster class. She was the forerunner of Bessie Bellwood in that department. And I have always held that she was possessed of much higher

artistic qualities than fell to the lot of poor Bessie. And she had the same readiness of retort when the “ gods ” in the gallery felt called upon to interpose with humours of their own. At the “ Mogul ” Jenny Hill had frequent opportunities of exhibiting her skill in this direction, and never failed to score off her saucy admirers on the slopes of cloud-capped Olympus. Bessie Bellwood revelled in the same sort of conflict. But it must be admitted that the older artist had the command of a more subtle and good-humoured method. Bellwood’s retorts were often coarse, and always stung. But, although the less accomplished performer of the two, Bessie Bellwood made a quicker jump into fame and achieved a wider popularity than her older rival. It was another case of getting hold of a song that has a “ hit ” in it. “ What cheer, ’Ria ! ’Ria’s on the job ! ” lifted the unknown genius immediately into the front rank—a position which she kept till her death. The regard in which this absolutely untaught woman was held was shown by the thousands of the public that turned out to follow her funeral, and line the streets through which the procession to the cemetery passed.

It was with the utmost difficulty that Bessie Bellwood could be induced to study a new song. She had no love for music. She had plenty of money, she was fond of racing and Society and fun of all kinds. She could read and write, but that was about all. Arthur Williams was the only man I ever met who seemed to know anything of her early life, and he always declared that her occupation, before she went on the stage, was that of skinning rabbits in the East End. Notwithstanding the obscurity of her origin and the paucity of her attainments, she was the chosen domestic companion of a Duke and of a Marquis !

It may seem strange, to a generation possessing only an experience of the chastened variety theatre of the period, to learn that in my day a person entirely lacking in education should attain to a foremost position on the music-half stage. But the thing was by no means uncommon. An amusing case in point occurs to me. Hollingshead, of the Gaiety, was always on the lookout for “ talent,” and he was

not at all particular as to the source from which he drew it. Calling on him one day at the theatre, I found him considerably upset by a discovery which he had just made. He had long admired the performance of a certain music-hall artist, and, when an opportunity arose, he offered him a part in a burlesque then in course of preparation. Good terms were offered. The music-hall artist was flattered, and the offer was accepted. But when his part was handed to him by the stage-manager, it was found to be of no earthly use to him, for he could not read ! Fortunately, the artist's ignorance in other matters came to Hollingshead's assistance in determining the engagement. For the contract had been signed in the gentleman's name by a friend, and was invalid !

One of those incidents by which one may note the progress of an evolution comes in its natural order in this place. Albert Chevalier had failed to obtain from the general public supporting the theatre the amount of attention and critical admiration that was accorded to him freely by the judicious few. For years he was known at club banquets and the like as the writer, composer, and singer, of those coster songs which have since won for him fame and fortune. In a burlesque of "Aladdin" put on at the Strand Theatre by Edouin, Chevalier introduced his famous "'Armonic Club." Its humours appealed for the moment, but it did not make one of those "hits" the impact of which sets all the town tingling. And for a long time after the run of the Strand "Aladdin" Chevalier was unable to obtain "a shop." He was one of the many unfortunate artists whose peculiar vein of talent had not found the proper assay.

When he was at last offered an engagement as a music-hall singer, he naturally hesitated at taking a step which he rightly regarded as irrevocable. He recognized the fact that his acceptance meant a renunciation of the theatre. And to his profession—hard mistress though she had been—he was deeply attached. I was one of those friends to whom he repaired for advice over what appeared to him a momentous issue. I am glad to recall the fact that I strongly advised him to take the plunge. Nor was I ever in doubt as to the success of his songs with an audience even then

emerging from under the spell of the raucous and " rawty " comiques. A number of us went to the Pavilion to witness his début. We had scattered ourselves all over the hall—it was the new building, and not the stuffy old hole of the seventies—and we were prepared to act as an unsalaried claue. But our services were never needed. With great judgment, Chevalier had selected as his first song " The Coster's Serenade." It went home at once. The delicacy of the art appealed alike to stalls and gallery. This refinement of treatment was novel. It was something like a revelation to the " gods." The song went with a will. And Chevalier's fortune was assured. We who had attended as unpaid and unwanted claquers were not without a vocation, after all. We were watchers at the parting of the ways. The old music-hall of the Great Vances and the Bessie Bellwoods was passing away. The new order of the Fragsons and the Margaret Coopers was imminent.

It is difficult, in tracing the course of any evolution, to attribute exactly the dates of transition, or to assign scientifically the contributing causes of change. But I think that one would not be far from the truth in attributing to three causes the wonderful improvement which has taken place in music-hall conditions and entertainments in the course of a generation.

In the first place, the erection of more modern, more pretentious, and more comfortable buildings on the ruins of the ancient pest-houses almost necessitated a performance from which should be eliminated the more objectionable features of the old pothouse programme. In the second place, due importance should be given to the persistent efforts of managers of the Charles Morton school, who, foreseeing the possibilities of the variety show, cherished high ideals, but cherished them on strictly business lines. In the third place, one must allow something for an improvement in public taste. This factor is—for reasons which I cannot discuss here—the least potent. But it is far from being negligible. It is a case, indeed, in which the supply created the demand, not where the demand created the supply.

Charles Morton, whose name must be imperishably associated with the transformation of the halls, was the least professional-looking manager in London. He was of short stature, wore ginger-coloured side-whiskers, dressed in a frock-coat and silk hat, and affected gold pince-nez. Asked to guess at his calling in life, a stranger would probably have put him down as the owner of a large suburban drapery establishment, who acted on Sundays as sidesman at the nearest church. And, truth to tell, Morton's innate sense of decorum was so strong that his demeanour in the halls over which he presided would have done credit to a churchwarden. No man was ever half so respectable as Charlie Morton looked. His work was none the less efficient and permanent on that account. And it is satisfactory to reflect that he who had commenced the crusade against pornography at the Canterbury, on the other side of the water, should have lived to preside for years over the fortunes of the Palace, in the heart of the West End.

In the seventies the Alhambra was not reckoned—as it is to-day—among the “‘alls.” The Empire and kindred establishments were as yet undreamt of by the pleasure-hunter. And the Alhambra was a thing apart. Leicester Square, on the eastern side of which it is situated, was then the most disreputable spot of earth to be found in the centre of any capital in Europe. Here on the sunniest summer days might be found promenading some of the most villainous adventurers from the capitals of Europe. They cloaked themselves like brigands, glared at the passing shop-girls with wicked black eyes, twirled their fierce moustaches, and rolled cigarettes with a diligence which they gave to no other innocent pursuit. They were the off-scourings of Europe. The swindlers, gamblers, political rogues, the *soulteneurs*, the craven shirkers of conscription, the European riff-raff that chooses London as its favourite dumping-ground, were all to be found promenading in Leicester Square. John Leech has fixed the type in the pages of *Punch*. The interesting *émigré* may still be detected prowling about the vicinity. But he is a wonderfully ameliorated brigand—a tame and nearly normal invader. The improvement in

the enclosure itself accounts for this. The squalor in which he throve as in his native element has gone. And the picturesque but filthy villain has happily gone with it. The “ Lee-cess-tare Squar ” of my salad days is no more !

The paling that surrounded the gardens in the centre of the square had been broken down. It became the receptacle of the least sanitary parts of the rubbish of the neighbourhood. And as the rubbish-heaps increased, augmented by contributions of dead dog and dead cat, the gamins of the place found it become more and more desirable as a rallying-point and a playground. A statue of one of the Georges bestrode an adipose charger (fearfully out of drawing) on a pedestal in the centre of the enclosure. Everything of a humorous and adventurous kind which took place in the West End in those days was put down to the medical students of the Metropolis. After a night of dense fog, the public passing through the square discovered that the King’s steed had been given a coat of white paint relieved by black spots. On another foggy night the same body of roisterers—or another—unhorsed the monarch, and broke him into pieces, scattering his remains on the ground ; for the effigy was not carved out of marble, but was a case of moulded metal. The monarch was discovered to be a hollow mockery. For a time the spotted horse dominated the squalid enclosure, grotesque and riderless.

Then Baron Grant appeared upon the scene, and proceeded to abate this Metropolitan nuisance. Grant was a company-promoter of the well-known type. His real name was Gottheimer ; and he sought, but failed to obtain, a seat in Parliament as a Member of one of the London divisions. He built an enormous house in Kensington, known as “ Grant’s Folly.” Before the mansion was finished the owner went “ broke,” and, as it was not found suited to the requirements of any of the few millionaires then in need of a town-house, it was pulled down and the materials sold. The marble pillars supporting the ceiling in the hall of “ Grant’s Folly ” now adorn the grill-room of the Holborn Restaurant. Grant, having obtained the necessary permission, set about the task of converting Leicester Square

Charles Morton, whose name must be imperishably associated with the transformation of the halls, was the least professional-looking manager in London. He was of short stature, wore ginger-coloured side-whiskers, dressed in a frock-coat and silk hat, and affected gold pince-nez. Asked to guess at his calling in life, a stranger would probably have put him down as the owner of a large suburban drapery establishment, who acted on Sundays as sidesman at the nearest church. And, truth to tell, Morton's innate sense of decorum was so strong that his demeanour in the halls over which he presided would have done credit to a churchwarden. No man was ever half so respectable as Charlie Morton looked. His work was none the less efficient and permanent on that account. And it is satisfactory to reflect that he who had commenced the crusade against pornography at the Canterbury, on the other side of the water, should have lived to preside for years over the fortunes of the Palace, in the heart of the West End.

In the seventies the Alhambra was not reckoned—as it is to-day—among the “'alls.” The Empire and kindred establishments were as yet undreamt of by the pleasure-hunter. And the Alhambra was a thing apart. Leicester Square, on the eastern side of which it is situated, was then the most disreputable spot of earth to be found in the centre of any capital in Europe. Here on the sunniest summer days might be found promenading some of the most villainous adventurers from the capitals of Europe. They cloaked themselves like brigands, glared at the passing shop-girls with wicked black eyes, twirled their fierce moustaches, and rolled cigarettes with a diligence which they gave to no other innocent pursuit. They were the off-scourings of Europe. The swindlers, gamblers, political rogues, the *souteneurs*, the craven shirkers of conscription, the European riff-raff that chooses London as its favourite dumping-ground, were all to be found promenading in Leicester Square. John Leech has fixed the type in the pages of *Punch*. The interesting *émigré* may still be detected prowling about the vicinity. But he is a wonderfully ameliorated brigand—a tame and nearly normal invader. The improvement in

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failed to get away satisfactorily. The weight of the machine in tow was no doubt the cause; and De Groof, fearing collision with a church-steeple in Sidney Street, Fulham Road, detached his apparatus prematurely. The machine fell to the earth like a stone, and the unfortunate inventor was instantly killed.

The Alhambra audiences were drawn by an exhibition of terpsichorean art and female beauty. And establishments devoting themselves to such an exhibition will have lots of hangers-on. One of the most noticeable of these was an exceedingly well-known but ancient and cadaverous-looking Hebrew not wholly unconnected—if there was anything in current report—with West End usury. He was supposed to be the benefactor of beauty in distress—the guide, philosopher, and friend, of impecunious maidenhood. Nor was his philanthropy confined to members of the *corps de ballet*.

Certain of the habitués of the house had an admission behind the scenes to what was known as the "canteen," enjoying the privilege, which, strangely enough, seems to appeal both to youth and old age, of drinking champagne made of gooseberries in the company of ballet-girls in gauze skirts and no bodices to speak of. It has always struck me as strange that men accustomed to luxurious surroundings in their homes and clubs can extract any pleasure in becoming temporary participants of an existence the dominant note of which is squalor, in which all the senses are disagreeably assaulted, and the inevitable consequence of which is a poignant sense of personal degradation! The "canteen" is, happily, a thing of the past.

Before Baum's management of the Alhambra it was conducted for a time by a man called Strange. This gentleman had been previously a waiter at the St. James's Restaurant—the "Jimmy's" of later days—and he was running the show, I think, in 1870. During that lurid year the Alhambra made a lot of money, for the war feeling ran high, and the management astutely gave prominence in its programme to rival national airs. Partisanship was evoked. The house was nightly crowded by patriots on both sides, and scuffles and encounters were among the ordinary diversions of the

evening. It is wonderful to see how doughty and valorous your fighting man who stays at home can be ! Strange was supposed by the supporters of the house to be consumed by a hopeless passion for the *première danseuse*, who spurned his addresses. I never asked him about it, for, although he always made an effort to be civil to persons of my calling, he was a churlish fellow, and he wore flowing side-whiskers, which was in itself an offence. Both he and the object of his middle-aged affection have been dead this many a day.

My memory of the Alhambra stage is as a dream of fair women. Whether as ballet-girls, as singers, or as actresses in opera-bouffe, the women engaged were always lovely. They become visualized for me now in a procession of pretty faces and divine forms. There is Kate Santley, fair-haired and vivacious, and fresh from the music-halls and her success with " The Bells go ringing for Sarah ! " There passes now Cornélie D'Anka, the golden-haired Hungarian, with the Amazonian figure and the exquisite voice ; and behind her, as I look, looms, indistinct but recognizable, the figure of an Oriental potentate visiting our shores—that, indeed, of the Shah of Persia. Scasi, with her well-trained voice, passes from the Alhambra to the Surrey Gardens. Scasi, as will be seen, is Isaacs spelled backwards, and with the superfluous " a " deleted. She was the daughter of a furniture-dealer in Great Queen Street. The old Surrey Gardens, for which she abandoned the Alhambra, was the scene of the last appearance in public of the beautiful Valérie Reece—the late Lady Meux. Strange to think that the delightfully irresponsible little Bohémienne of the jocund days should have evolved into the owner of a Derby winner—Volodyvoski, which she leased to the American, Mr. Whitney—and the organizer and provider of equipment to a battery of artillery for service in South Africa. The name of Julia Seaman calls up to me that lady's appearance in " The Black Crook," in which fine production she played with extraordinary effect the part of the malignant fairy. A more inspiring performance than that in which I subsequently saw her at Paravicini's theatre in Camden Town. She then essayed—not very convincingly—the rôle of Hamlet.

Pitteri was *première danseuse* for more years than it would be quite gallant to recall. Although assuming the chief place in ballet, this famous dancer possessed none of those sylph-like characteristics which are usually associated with the chief of the ballerine. She was a lady of opulent charms and large figure. In those days there was always engaged in the Alhambra production that epicene excrescence, the male ballet-dancer. At the Alhambra it was the duty of this individual to support the figure of Pitteri as she made a semicircle in the air, and to hold her when she assumed those poses which alternated her spells of purely terpsichorean exercise. The man ballet-dancer supporting Pitteri earned his wages whatever they may have been. Sara—known as Wiry Sal—was another favourite of the Alhambra ballet. This lady belonged to the high-kicking, athletic order of Corybantes. She was accompanied by two other high-kickers, and the three became known about town as “the world, the flesh, and the devil.”

After the reign of John Baum, the directors of the Alhambra were for ever changing their manager. All sorts and conditions of managers—from William Holland and Joseph Cave up to John Hollingshead—had a try at it. But not one of them seemed able to get along with the Nagles, the Suttons, and the Winders, of the board of directors. One by one these reactionaries died off, and under a reconstructed board and an enterprising and settled management the establishment at present flourishes like a green bay-tree.

One of the last occasions on which I visited the Alhambra in my capacity as a member of the Press was on the occasion of Sandow's appearance at that establishment. He challenged and defeated a “strong man” who was then drawing the town. After the performance we were invited to a supper given in the champion's honour in a café—the name of which I forget; it stood between the Alhambra and the Cavour—for even in those early days Sandow had a keen appreciation of the value of a *réclame*. Sir Reginald Hanson took the chair on the occasion, and the police paid us a domiciliary visit at one o'clock in the morning. Our names

and addresses were solemnly taken down—a ceremony which occupied much time ; but we never heard any more of the matter. Sandow has gone far since that frugal entertainment of the London Press.

The café at which we were invited to sup with Sandow must have occupied the site, or have been very close to it, once devoted to the squalid orgies of " The Judge and Jury." Elsewhere in these rambling reminiscences I have alluded to ineffaceable memories which one would willingly expunge. Through life one looks back on experiences which one would gladly forget, but cannot. They cling like burrs, and pursue like an evil odour. My recollection of " The Judge and Jury " furnishes such an experience. I visited the place once. Nothing on earth could induce me to pay it a second visit. The entertainment was in two parts. The first consisted of a mock trial presided over by " Baron Nicholson." Before this libidinous old president, " barristers," duly arrayed in wig and gown, called witnesses, male and female of their kind, and proceeded to examine and cross-examine with an amount of licence and obscenity that set up in the hearer a sort of moral nausea. The " Baron's " charge to the jury was a tissue of ribaldry and bawdry which to me seemed simply awful, but which appealed to the habitués of the squalid hall.

The trial at an end, Nicholson's bench was removed, and behind it was seen to be a stage-curtain. To the strains of a piano this was drawn up, and on a revolving platform were discovered the figures of some women representing groups from the classics. The goddesses of Olympus were more sadly aspersed by this exhibition of shameless flesh than had been the Bench and Bar of England by Nicholson's travesty. As the platform revolved, the women, with nothing on save their pink fleshings, smirked and leered at the audience in front. Needless to say, the figures in this exhibition of *posé plastique* were neither young nor beautiful. The pink fleshings could scarcely keep in place the sagging charms of a mature Venus, the lank limbs and scraggy neck of Diana. . . . Faugh ! London knows better now.

CHAPTER XVI

MINE EASE AT MINE INN

PEOPLE have short memories—particularly in the matter of benefits received. To-day, for instance, it is the usual and the correct thing to credit the London County Council with all that has been accomplished for the beautification of London during recent years. Yet the two greatest improvements carried out in my time were not done by the Council at all. The two municipal achievements to which I allude are the Holborn Viaduct, and that magnificent boulevard, the Thames Embankment. Now, these two enduring monuments of municipal enterprise and foresight we owe to the old—and much-maligned—Board of Works. When I gaze dismayed on the hideous structure at Spring Gardens, which now admits the public through its bowels to St. James's Park ; and when, entering and traversing the Park, I see the grim bastion that has been erected at the end of the duck-pond, with the object, apparently, of dwarfing Buckingham Palace into the likeness of a row of aristocratic almshouses, I wonder whether we were not safer, when all is said and done, in the hands of the reprobated " Board of Shirks," as it was called by the comic papers of its day.

Give a man beautiful surroundings, and he will begin to live up to his environment. With the wonderful improvement effected on the face of London by the operations of the Board, there became heard the still, small voice of a demand for more beautiful living. The two main elements in living, I take it, are eating and drinking. And, rightly or wrongly, I have always synchronized the completion of the Viaduct and the Embankment with the first noticeable advance in catering. Before that point of departure there

were in London but two restaurants of the first class at which one could obtain a French dinner. One of these was the Café Royal ; the other was Verrey's. Both were—and still, happily, are—situated in Regent Street. To-day we have restaurants which quite easily surpass in elegance and amplitude of interior the two houses I have named, but the Café Royal still holds its own both in the matter of cellar and of cuisine.

There were humbler retreats at which the French manner of dining might be enjoyed. Soho was full of these small eating-houses at which the customers might either dine *à la carte* at a moderate cost, or eat a dinner of the *table d'hôte* order for eighteen pence, with half a bottle of wine thrown in. For this you would get a *soup maigre*, a *sole au vin blanc*, an entrée, a bit of chicken, a morsel of Brie or Camembert, and the smallest possible collection of nuts and raisins on a Tom Thumb plate, which was written down "dessert" on the menu. As a rule the dinner was not half bad, and the wonder was how it could be done at the price. Of the wine one cannot talk so enthusiastically. Charles Lever once described a vintage which he tasted in Italy. He spoke of it as "a pyroligneous wine, distilled from vine-stalks, and agreeable in summer—with one's salad." This admirably sets forth the virtues of the sour but ruddy products of Bordeaux which were "thrown in" by the enterprising exiles who catered in Soho. The best of these smaller restaurants was Kettner's, in Church Street, close to where the Palace Theatre now stands. It is difficult, when one enters the elegant rooms which are now known as Kettner's, to call up its small beginnings. Many of its old customers cursed the day when it was "discovered" by Mr. E. S. Dallas, of the *Times*. Dallas was a man who could not keep a secret. Having found out what a wonderfully well-cooked dinner the little restaurant in Church Street could supply to the customer for a very trifling cost, he must needs go and proclaim the fact from the house-tops of Printing House Square. All London began to flock to Church Street, and all London was delighted to see Madame Kettner presiding as *dame du comptoir*, and to learn that

the dainty dishes provided were prepared by Monsieur Kettner in the basement below. This influx of visitors brought about increased accommodation, improved service, a greater luxury in the surroundings, until Kettner's became what it is to-day—a West End resort with some considerable support from fashionable society.

Prices went up, too. Dallas, who had very appropriately signed his letter to the leading journal "A Beast at Feeding-time," could no longer get a portion of *sole au vin blanc* for sixpence, and the poor French exiles who were wont to forgather in Kettner's little dining-room in Church Street were driven forth to seek sustenance elsewhere in the fastnesses of Soho. I wonder what those patient old *émigrés* would have said concerning an incident which happened to me some few years since at this famous restaurant? I was dining in a private room as the guest of a man who was wanting to "do business" with me. Beside myself there was one other guest. After dinner our host, who was a non-smoker, asked us to have a cigar. He called the waiter. Cigars were ordered.

"Wat price, sare?" inquired the servant.

"The best you have will not be too good for my friends," declared our host in an expansive mood.

The cigars came—big things swathed in gold-foil. We took a cigar each, and St. Georgi, who had married the widow Kettner and was now running the show, came in to see how we were getting on. Him also our host asked to have a cigar. St. Georgi complied. That made three cigars in all. At last the time came for paying. The bill was brought in. The founder of the feast ran his eye over it. The document was quite in order—save for one item.

"Here, waiter, what the doose is the meaning of this fifteen shillings?" he asked.

"Three cigars, sare," he replied sweetly.

"Fifteen shillings!" exclaimed our non-smoking host.

"I am sorry, sare," replied the waiter, looking very sad indeed; "*but we have none better!*"

It was a palpable hit. Our friend joined in the laugh—and paid.

One of the most characteristic of these foreign eating-houses on English soil was the Café l'Étoile, in one of the streets—Rupert Street, I think it was—which run off Coventry Street, parallel to Wardour Street. This place was one half restaurant, and one half cabaret. A door and a passage led from the one to the other. In the restaurant the usual eighteen-penny dinner of many courses was served, and the usual bottle of vinegary wine was “thrown in.” The company, if not select, was at least sedate. Your Frenchman in London is by no means as gay a creature as on his boulevards at home. And the few English who joined him at his frugal meal in the Café l'Étoile as a rule maintained their insular *mauvais honte*.

But in the adjoining cabaret things were very different. Here the bearded exiles were enveloped in such an impenetrable cloud of smoke that they had forgotten all about their *milieu*. They had created here their own atmosphere, so to say. And a particularly villainous atmosphere it was—sulphurous and pestiferous. The chatter was incessant and strident. The clatter of the dominoes on the tables, the noise of the impact of the mugs and glasses—these mingled indistinguishably with the universal din. In this stifling atmosphere might be encountered some of the off-scourings of Continental cities. The political refugee, finding security in a country that could afford to treat him with absolute contempt, talked treason only when in his cups. Here was the practical politician also—the dynamitard, the artificer of bombs, the professor of the stiletto and the revolver. Scotland Yard had the dossier of every frequenter of the Café l'Étoile duly consigned by the police authorities of Paris, Berlin, and St. Petersburg. It was the most noisy, the most stuffy, the hottest, the dirtiest, the most polyglot, little hell in all London. I do not know, but I strongly suspect that a too constant solicitude on the part of Scotland Yard led to its disappearance. Its site is occupied by a restaurant called the West End Hotel, the reputable successor of an unsavoury progenitor.

To William Gorman Wills I owe my introduction to most of the Soho restaurants. Wills liked the company he found

in these places, and he liked the prices ; for he was seldom well off. Money flowed from him in all directions, so that he never had much for his own use. It was lent or given in lumps as soon as it was received, a good deal of it finding its way into the pockets of impostors. For Wills was a man of genius—one of the few I have ever met—and inherited that financial incapacity which is the birthright of men of genius. He was an artist first of all, and had a studio in the Brompton Road, in a crescent which stood where the Consumptive Hospital now stands. He was a musician of distinction. He wrote a novel which would have made the reputation of any man who paid attention to the social arts which expedite the arrival of Fame. He will, perhaps, be still remembered by the public for his many contributions to the stage. His "Charles I.," produced at the Lyceum for Irving, was one of the most poetical acting plays of the last century—Byron, and Lytton, and Sheridan Knowles, to the contrary, notwithstanding. In his search after French cookery he was instant. And I remember the delight with which he took me to Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, where a new café had been opened. The dining-saloon consisted of the two ground-floor rooms of an ordinary house thrown into one. Wills waved his arm as if to indicate to me fine spaces—like those of the Louvre, for instance.

"All the artists of the neighbourhood will dine here," he declared with conviction. "If we could only get old Madox Brown to come here once, he would never go to the trouble of having dinners cooked at home !"

Madox Brown lived in Fitzroy Square, so that the convenience of the arrangement seemed indisputable. And Charlotte Street, as well as some other streets with long first-floor windows, was still a thoroughfare in which artists set up their studios. The Bohemia of "The Newcomes" was still existing north of Oxford Street when I first knew London, and when I have visited Madox Brown in Fitzroy Square it has given me pleasure to think that his might be the very building which was tenanted for a time by Colonel Newcome. But if a tithe of the artists then work-

ing in that part of the town were to demand a meal at the restaurant newly discovered by Wills, the majority of them must have had their dinner served to them in the street. An invasion even of the members of the Madox Brown family would have strained the resources of the tiny place to the utmost.

At the time when Wills was making daily discoveries among the little French eating-houses of Soho and Bloomsbury, he had few imitators in that field of gastronomics. The Englishman still pooh-poohed the French cuisine. He never hesitated to express his contempt for what he called "kickshaws." Give him a basin of mock turtle soup, a bit of boiled turbot, a cut off the joint, and two vegetables, with apple pudding and Stilton cheese to end up with, and he wouldn't thank you for the finest repast conceived by the first chef, and prepared by the most expert assistants in Europe ! There are still fine old English gentlemen who hold this heresy ; but they all held it then. The consequence is that half the population, over fifty years of age, suffer from indigestion. But while this most barbarous standard of dining obtained, it was faithfully catered for by the fine old English gentleman's staunch admirer — the fine old English landlord. And to this day there persist a few establishments which make it their business to supply the fine old English dinner for the fine old English gormandizer.

In the early seventies all the hotels, and almost all the restaurants, supplied nightly the heavy meals that then represented the national taste. In an earlier chapter I have alluded to the Rainbow in Fleet Street, and to the Albion in Russell Street, Covent Garden. These were typical. Simpson's in the Strand was run on the same lines. This was a very famous house of its kind. I have not visited the place since it was rebuilt during the alterations at the Savoy. But it carries on the old tradition, I understand ; that is to say, a customer can still have his slabs of fish and his thick cuts from the joint, but he is granted an option. He may have his food served in daintier guise. The smoking-room at Simpson's was a great rendezvous for men who knew good whisky and were judges of a cigar.

For the cigar divan next door to the restaurant was really part of the concern. It was in that little smoking-room that I first met Charles Kelly, the actor. He became the second husband of Ellen Terry, and was one of the most charming men I have ever known. His real name was Wardell, and he had thrown up his commission in a crack cavalry regiment to "go on the stage."

Simpson's was celebrated for something beside its typical old English fare, its excellent whisky, and its incomparable cigars. In a certain upper chamber at Simpson's there were accustomed to meet all the most eminent chess-players of the day. Steinnitz and Blackmore could be found there on most afternoons. And, although it was known in the outside world that they could be seen without any let or hindrance on the part of the proprietor, their privacy was never invaded. Only amateurs of the game entered the chess-room. Your true Londoner differs in this from the citizens of other towns : he never intrudes where he is not wanted. As to the restaurant below, the dinner there was served in a square saloon at the back of the building. The joints were trundled up to the customers on "dumb-waiters" running on castors. The meal was of the usual heavy, stodgy description. The older diners ate heartily, and, as a rule, suffered horribly from dyspepsia. The waiters breathed hard, exhibited signs of a bibulous habit, and possessed the largest feet of any men I have seen either before or since.

In Covent Garden, the Tavistock, the Hummums, and the Bedford—each of them hotels—served the same class of dinner. At these comfortable resorts the meal was generally followed by a bottle of port, thus insuring the achievement of that indigestion which the stodgy comestibles may have failed to set up. The ordinary English restaurant was supplemented by the chop-house. In the City, where quick lunching is a desideratum, these establishments flourished exceedingly. In the West End the most noted of them was Stone's, in Panton Street, at that period a thoroughfare with a bad name, but at the present time purged of its earlier reputation. It has a theatre, some

elegant restaurants, and exhibits few signs of its squalid past. Panton Street has forsworn sack, and lives cleanly.

But this chapter is not designed as a mere catalogue of the catering houses, but as the rough sketch of an evolution illustrated by examples, and illuminated here and there, I hope, by anecdotes, relevant and irrelevant. I have sufficiently shown that the Englishman of the early seventies, dining from home, liked to have served to him the same sort of meal which was provided for him on Sundays in the bosom of his family. The Café Royal catered mainly for foreigners. It and the Café Verrey were—so far as Londoners were concerned—but two voices crying in the wilderness. While as for the minor French restaurants in Soho, only artists, poets, and other degenerate Englishmen, affected those cheery little outposts of a great army which was presently to take possession of the town. To-day the conquest of London by the foreigner is complete. The French cuisine has been adopted in all the principal hotels and restaurants, and the old fish-joint-sweets-and-Stilton menu has been relegated to the howling wilderness.

I will give three instances of the progress of the reform. I select Gatti's in the Strand, Romano's in the same thoroughfare, and Pagani's in Great Portland Street. Of the three, Gatti's is the least characteristically French, although an excellent French meal may be obtained there. The Gattis aimed to be all things to all men; and I hope it may not prejudice the reader if I mention that it is to-day a favourite resort of Mr. Lloyd George, who may frequently be seen at the Adelaide Gallery in company with a brother Welshman, the esteemed proprietor of *Ally Sloper*. The growth of the Gatti concern is one of the commercial marvels of the day. It started as a café in Adelaide Street, where fried chops and steaks with chipped potatoes were served on marble-topped tables. The meal was washed down with generous draughts of coffee or chocolate, and the prices were strictly moderate. To-day the establishment has struck right through into the Strand, and spread itself halfway along Adelaide Street. Its proprietors own two playhouses in the immediate vicinity—the Adelphi and the Vaudeville—

and supply half the Strand with electric current from their own dynamos. It is the culinary Mecca of the suburban, and actors as well as Chancellors find it a convenient place at which to lunch.

As a rule a restaurant fails or forges ahead on its own merits or demerits. But now and then the chance visit of an influential customer lifts it from obscurity into the warm light of popular favour. You have seen how E. S. Dallas made the fortune of Kettner's. Carr's, in the Strand, was made by an article which appeared in *All the Year Round*, an article which was generally attributed to Dickens, but was in reality the work of one of his staff—Sala, Halliday, Hollingshead, or another; in fact, the writers on that magazine had so entirely acquired the descriptive trick of "the Master" that it was a difficult thing to "tell t'other from which." Poor Pellegrini was the man who discovered Pagani's. It was a poky little place, indifferently patronized, when he first entered it. But he soon discovered that he could get there spaghetti cooked and served as in his native Italy. It was served, too, with a pureé of tomato very different from the watery and acid preparation to which in this country we had become habituated. Tosti the composer followed where Pellegrini had led. The small refreshment-room was enlarged; an "artists' room" was established upstairs. At last adjoining premises were acquired. Old Pagani's was rebuilt into the handsome and popular restaurant as it is known to the present generation of diners. The Paganis have retired on substantial fortunes to the mountainous land of their nativity.

In carrying out structural alterations, the Paganis, with characteristic astuteness, determined that the "artists' room" should not be tampered with by the builders. In London no interior is so rich in mural decorations contributed, gratis and off-hand, by distinguished men using the apartment. Tosti has written up some bars of a song, dear old Pellegrini has contributed some sketches, and other artists have from time to time added to the exhibition, happy to enrich it if only by an autograph. The sketches, signatures, and bits of musical composition, have been

covered with glass. In other respects the famous upper chamber remains much what it was in the old days. In that room I have spent many happy, interesting, and memorable nights. One of the most memorable of these was on the occasion of a supper given by my friend Patrick Edward Dove, to the members of the first company that performed "Cavalleria Rusticana" in London. Dove was a barrister of Lincoln's Inn, famous for his knowledge of Patent Law, his acquaintance with the music of the bagpipes (he had made a collection of several hundred pibroch "scores"), and his unerring taste as a gastronome. When last I visited Pagani's, they still mixed a salad known as *salad à la Dove*. The new opera had been produced at the Shaftesbury, conducted by Arditi, and the tenor part had been entrusted to Vignas, a singer new to the town. All the principals responded to Dove's invitation, and the "artists' room" became the arena of more noise and enthusiasm than had ever been exhibited there before. The tenor turned up rather late, being, I have no doubt, a nice judge of the psychological moment at which to contrive a dramatic entrance. These children of art and of the South proceeded "to signify their approval in the usual manner." They rushed upon the poor man, and—men and women alike—fell upon his neck and kissed him. To a mere Englishman the scene was rather embarrassing. But it was soon over, and the rest of the night passed in immense chattering and jabbering, everybody seeming to talk at once, and the utmost amity and joyousness informing the polyglot crowd.

In the early days of Pagani's the patrons of the restaurant were nearly all Italians, and among them the most picturesque figure was that of a very old gentleman with long silvery hair, extremely classic features, and scrupulously clean linen, a circumstance remarkable in an Italian restaurant of the period. The old gentleman made his appearance each day between twelve and one, and was always respectfully saluted by his compatriots. He had a very frugal midday meal, consisting principally of a decoction of eggs in a tumbler. After this he would sit chatting over his coffee with friends, who took chairs near him, until

well on into the afternoon. They were informal receptions of a kind, these afternoons of the handsome old man ; for he had been Garibaldi's doctor, and naturally was held in high regard by his compatriots. His disappearance all at once from his accustomed place was, of course, much commented on. It was supposed that he was ill. On inquiry, however, it was discovered that he was only married. A lady had fallen in love with the dear old chap, carried him off, and married him. The bride probably considered that the domestic hearth was more suited to her husband than life in restaurants, and so Pagani's knew him no more.

Romano had been a waiter at the Café Royal ; and while engaged in this capacity he must have picked up a great deal of experience of London Society and its ways, which stood him in good stead when he found himself the owner of a smart restaurant in the Strand. A good many men, and, indeed, some well-known publications, like to pose as the "discoverers" of Romano's. As a matter of fact, Romano was discovered by George Piesse, an epicurean West End book-maker ; and its first regular customers were the London representative of the *New York Herald*, and the ubiquitous and frugal "Ape." It gradually became known to those who liked *œuf à la cocotte* and other Parisian delicacies. Then it made one of those sharp and sudden ascents into popularity, its prices ascending with a proportionate sharpness and suddenness. At luncheon-time there was a difficulty in getting a table in the long narrow saloon, looking like a disused shooting-gallery. The bar that ran in front was crammed with book-makers, pressmen, chorus-ladies, champagne-shippers, and young peers seeing life. In a word, Romano's was "booming." Bessie Bellwood made it one of her usual haunts of an afternoon ; Hughie Drummond dropped in after a day on the Stock Exchange ; "Billy" Fitzwilliam was a supporter of its clever proprietor ; poor "Kim" Mandeville (afterwards Duke of Manchester) was a regular customer. The two least popular members of the congregation joined somewhat later. These were the Marquis of Ailesbury and Abingdon Baird, commonly called "the Squire." These

two gentlemen rarely appeared in public except accompanied by a couple of "bruisers," and their attitude to society in general entirely justified the precaution they took in providing themselves with bodyguards—or body-blackguards, shall I say? Romano's was for a long time the rallying-point of the more rapid section of men-about-town and their lady friends. But it was always more than this. Romano had learned his business in the best French school in London, and in his catering he always regarded the traditions of *la haute cuisine*, and he had a fine taste in wine, the advantages of which were at the disposal of his customers.

The evolution which I have described as working itself out in three establishments, all of which originated in small and unpromising beginnings and under somewhat adverse conditions, was elsewhere evident. While the small caravanserai of Soho, with its cheap dinner and *vin compris* was extending itself into the outer streets, and even as far as the suburbs, the founding of more swagger restaurants was taking place all round, and competent chefs began to look to London, and not any more to Paris, as the summit of their ambition. The Savoy was one of the first to take full advantage of the new direction of public taste. But at the present moment it has a hundred competitors, from the restaurant at the Waldorf, on the eastern confines of dinner-land, to the Ritz, on its western frontier.

Having now indicated the extent and importance of the reform which has been effected in our eating and drinking during the passing of a few short years, I must return for a moment to my muttons, and record one or two of the fading memories of other days. There was a table reserved in the Café Royal grill-room at which, of an afternoon, there was always a considerable amount of laughter. Here were wont to meet MacMahon, the inventor of the electric "tape" machine; Jenks, a gentleman who had made a million by running gaming-hells; Ives, of the *Morning*; and Jo Aaronson, the brother of the well-known New York entrepreneur. There were others who were made welcome at this grill-room gathering, so that as often as not the table had to be doubled by adding another. Aaronson was

a quaint American with a national sense of humour, a nice knowledge of the moment at which to "chip in" with a story, and a slight stutter, which gave an added value to everything he said. I remember one day quite well when, with a face drawn and melancholy, he recounted to us the details of a misfortune which had overtaken him. His uncle John had died in London, and Jo had been entrusted with the melancholy duty of having the body cremated and buried. Jo described the cremation with great detail and picturesqueness, showed himself receiving the sacred ashes in an urn, and hurrying with his precious vase to the railway-station, in order to catch a train to town. When Jo arrived in town, he hurried out of the train, got into a cab, and automatically told the driver to go to his club. It was not until Jo arrived at the club that he recollected that he had forgotten all about Uncle John! He had placed the ashes of the deceased in the hat-rack of the railway-carriage in which he had travelled, and, when he arrived at Waterloo, had forgotten all about it. And the ashes of Uncle John have not been recovered even unto this day.

The café, off which the grill-room opens, and which covers the greater portion of the ground-floor, became the most cosmopolitan rallying-point in London. For while the atmosphere of the place attracted Continental visitors of all nationalities, the quality of both the viands and wine, with the excellence of the cooking and service, soon made it a favourite resort of self-respecting Englishmen. Among the illustrious exiles who from time to time have sipped coffee over its domino-tables were Pilotel, the artist, who had left Paris after the Commune. Under that extraordinary form of misgovernment Pilotel had been Minister of Fine Arts. In London he discovered his *métier* in designing models for the Court milliners, and fashion-plates for the ladies' newspapers. A ribald wag once nicknamed him "the waister," employing that word, not in any derogatory sense, but as a tribute to the wasp-like proportions with which the great big man could endow a woman's bodice.

Boulanger has waxed voluble over his fortunes in this Regent Street refuge. And here the notorious Esterházy,

in later days, has consoled himself in exile, his moments soothed by the adulation of a female admirer. Here I have sat with Fred Sandys, the artist, while he has discussed politics from the Conservative point of view with Michael Davitt, the Nationalist, the only Irish politician I ever met who gave me the idea that he believed all he said. It all comes back to me—the rattle of the dominoes on the marble slabs, the air charged with the blue, acrid smoke from a hundred cigarettes, the quick transit of the white-aproned waiters, the pungent odour of the *café noir*, the flow of conversational chatter in half a dozen languages, the *frou-frou* of the passing skirt, the flash of dark eyes, the smile on vermilion lips, the high-pitched laugh over some picture in *Le Petit Journal pour Rire*, the general air of life and the joy of it. The history of the cellar at this famous restaurant is one of the romances of the wine trade, and would be out of place here. But it may just be noted that, when the vineyards in the South of France which had supplied the brandy grape were, in the seventies, laid bare by the phylloxera, the proprietor had provided for a shortage in the eighties; and when that shortage made itself felt, Frenchmen willingly paid the three shillings which were demanded then for a liqueur-glass of *fin champagne*.

Verrey's, on the other side of Regent Street, I have mentioned as the second West End establishment at which a French dinner could be obtained in those gastronomically evil days which preceded the great awakening. When I first knew Verrey's, it was run by old George Krehl, a most entertaining man of the old school. He was not a Parisian, or, indeed, a Frenchman at all; but he had been educated in the French methods, and his bisque was the most delicate to be obtained in London. At the death of the old man the restaurant descended to his son George, who has since died. George the younger Krehl was a dog-fancier in rather a large way of business. He ran a paper called *The Stock-keeper*, devoted to the interests of the "fancy." Krehl the Younger introduced some new breeds to Society, among which were the basset-hound and the schipperké.

In old Krehl's time Tennyson resorted to the restaurant

during his visits to town. The poet took quite a fancy to the proprietor, and Krehl preserved many souvenirs of the poet—plans of battle drawn on backs of menu-cards, and other trifles whereby Tennyson thought to make his meaning quite clear to a foreign listener.

It was in the old Krehl's time that I received an invitation to dine with an Australian magnate of British birth, on a visit to the mother-country. The dinner was served in what was then known as the Cameo Room, and the occasion became memorable to me by reason of an acquaintanceship then made, which was destined to ripen into a lasting friendship. It was in this way. I found myself seated next to a clergyman. The circumstance at first caused me to curse my luck, for I have never taken much stock in parsons. But before we had got to the fish I found that my neighbour was not at all of the class of clergyman with whom, to that time, it had been my fortune to get acquainted. He was a man of medium height, about fifty years of age, broad-shouldered, and of portly figure. His grey beard was trimmed and pointed, and he wore a moustache. His name was Bachelor, and he was a gaol chaplain.

At that time I discovered nothing of the life-work of the individual sitting beside me ; nor from himself did I ever hear anything, save incidentally, of his services to his generation—services never acknowledged, and services sometimes resented and always neglected by the authorities. I had beside me that night, in fact, one of those who, in their own persons, illustrate the truth of Henry Taylor's apothegm : "The world knows nothing of its greatest men." Here, at least, something may be recorded as a memorial to him. And at the same time the narrative may be enlivened by one or two of those stimulating recollections of which he seemed to be an inexhaustible mine. I never sat down to a dinner at which I enjoyed myself more. My new friend was a man of the world, a gourmet, a fine judge of wine, and withal a practical philanthropist, unresting, untiring, and undespairing.

Bachelor, after his ordination, went out to Australia as chaplain to the first Bishop of Tasmania. He passed from that position into the more active situation of chaplain to

the penal settlement there. From the beginning he took a strong human interest in his "parishioners," and he set to work in the grim employment unhampered by traditions or instructions, or preconceived notions of any sort. From the very start, his theory was that the men to whom he had now become ghostly adviser differed from those outside the settlement chiefly in the fact that they had been found out. Of course he differentiated the material with which he had to deal. This the Governor of the settlement discovered during his first interview with the new "sky-pilot." The conversation between them at length turned on the question of a servant for his reverence—a menial who had, of course, been selected from among the convicts.

"I've chosen a first-rate chap for you," said the Governor. "Capital cook, good valet, nice quiet manner, talks French like a native, and can mend your linen like a needlewoman."

"What's he in for?" inquired Bachelor.

"Forgery," replied the Governor.

"Couldn't you let me have a murderer?" inquired the new chaplain.

"If you like," replied the Governor, shrugging his shoulders, and regarding the new settler as a man suffering from a loose tile or so; and a murderer whose domestic accomplishments fitted him for the post was duly allotted to the parson.

"You see," he said, in relating the circumstance, "I counted on the fellow's gratitude; and I counted right. The chances of a murderer obtaining the position were about a million to one; and this fellow, knowing that fact, exhibited a dog's fidelity, a woman's solicitude, and the devotion of a fanatic to my person. He would at any moment have given his life to save mine."

Shortly after Bachelor arrived in Tasmania with its first Bishop, his lordship sent out an invitation to the "leading citizens," asking them to a reception at the "palace." The day after the invitations went out, the editor and proprietor of a newspaper in Tasmania called at the "palace," and demanded to see the new prelate. Now, this particular owner and conductor of an organ of public opinion kept his property going by a

systematic levying of blackmail—an easy and lucrative game in those early days; for very few of the “new rich” in Tasmania would care to have questions publicly asked about their origin. “Do you grow your own hemp?” asked Charles Lamb of his Australian correspondent. I need not labour a point which is still sore in Tasmania. The Bishop declined to see the caller. Bachelor, as his chaplain, was deputed to conduct the interview.

“I’m the editor and proprietor of a newspaper in Tasmania, and I want to know why I’m not invited to the Bishop’s tea-fight?” said the truculent visitor, dashing *in medias res*.

“In your place I should accept the situation. I should not probe after reasons,” answered the chaplain with characteristic suavity.

“Gammon, parson! I’ve got to know. See? An’ if you don’t tell me now, I’ll repeat the question in the columns of my paper?” exclaimed this Australasian *littérateur*.

“Sounds rather like a threat, don’t you think?” observed Bachelor, with perfect temper; “and, if you *will* have it, I think I may now give you his lordship’s reason for declining to invite you.”

“Let her go!” said the editor encouragingly.

“The Bishop’s reason for omitting your name is simply this: that, in the old country, a man conducting a paper on your lines would be considered outside the social pale.”

The editor laughed uproariously. When he had recovered his breath, he answered in these remarkable words:

“Innercent lambs! Outside the social pale, hey! Lookye here, parson! You jest tell his lordship from me that, *in Tasmania, no man is outside the social pale—until he’s hanged!*”

In Sydney once it became the duty of Bachelor to see a well-known man out of the world through the trap of a gallows. Captain Knatchbull, a cadet of an old Kentish family, had been, while in command of one of H.M.’s ships, guilty of an offence against the civil law, for which he was tried and transported. He escaped from the convict settlement, and turned up in Sydney half mad with exposure and starvation. In the Bush he had probably perpetrated a crime which was

never laid to his charge, for he had got rid of his convict garb, and appeared in New South Wales fully attired in the clothes of a victim who was probably done to death before parting with them. The desperate man entered a baker's shop in a back street. The shop was empty. The man stretched his arm over the counter, and pulled out the till. The woman owning the shop suddenly appeared on the scene, and caught hold of the marauder's wrist, screaming the while for assistance. Knatchbull flung himself free, picked up the bread-knife from the counter, and silenced the poor woman for ever. He was caught red-handed. He was brought to trial, when the prosecuting counsel was Robert Lowe, destined for future fame in England, where he was to be Chancellor of the Exchequer and a peer of the realm. On the scaffold he was attended by Bachelor.

"Is there any last word you would like to say?" whispered the chaplain in his ear.

Knatchbull looked up, cast a critical eye over the ghastly apparatus, and, nodding his head in the direction of a defect, said, with the utmost composure :

"Yes. *There's a kink in that rope !*"

In another second his lifeless body was swinging at the end of the incriminated hemp. He afforded, then, did Captain Knatchbull, the supreme instance of "the ruling passion strong in death." He must pay the extreme penalty, but he had respectfully suggested that the execution should be ship-shape.

When he returned to England, Bachelor was appointed to Dartmoor. While he was abroad he could only get at the Home Office by means of a correspondence. Now he would be able to pay personal visits to the high officials in Whitehall during his holidays. No man ever made himself a greater nuisance to a Department in the sacred cause of humanity than did Bachelor. But humanity is a mere unofficial generality with which Whitehall has nothing whatever to do. He bombarded permanent officials, and he obtained introductions to successive Home Secretaries with a view of effecting some amelioration in the condition of the convict. When, by his own personal influence with

the prisoners at Dartmoor, he was successful in quelling the biggest and most elaborately organized mutiny known up to that time, he became no more of a *persona grata* than he had been before the outbreak. Officially he was merely the gaol chaplain. It was not the business of the Department to discover that they were dealing, not only with a humanitarian, but with a man who had forgotten more criminology than all the outsiders who write so glibly on the subject in journals and magazines had ever known.

I at once confess that Bachelor was not attracted to me at this dinner at Verrey's by any qualities of my own. He understood that I was on the Press, and he always endeavoured to create an interest in his views among pressmen whom he met. For some time he had urged on the Home Office the necessity there existed for supplying prisoners with a newspaper. His theory, founded upon years of intelligent observation, was that under our prison system a man becomes either abnormally ingenious or abnormally bestial. And he held that nothing except literature could successfully divert and dissipate ideas which were likely to become obsessions ; and that the most interesting literature would be news—very carefully edited, of course—of the outer world. American officials are not so hidebound as the home-made article ; and the idea of my friend, neglected and condemned in England, was welcomed and adopted in the United States, where the principal penitentiaries now run their own newspapers.

We worked together subsequently at this notion of a gaol journal, and I got out a "dummy" which showed pretty fully what the proposed organ should be. At the Home Office the science of circumlocution is better understood than in any other Department in Whitehall. There was voluminous correspondence, meaning much on the part of the parson, meaning little more than a lavish waste of the tax-payer's stiff stationery to the Home Office. Other ardent souls would have sunk under the continuous disappointments, delays, shufflings, impertinences, and utter indifference, of the Office ; but Bachelor's was not a nature to sink under anything. He was a man of the world ; his sympathy with his incarcerated parish did not stand in

the way of his own reasonable pleasures. So he kept on pegging away at Home Secretary after Home Secretary, always hopeful, cheerful, *débonnaire*. At last his reward came. A large parcel of monthly magazines of the *Leisure Hour* and *Good Words* type was delivered at his house, with a communication from the Home Secretary. The chaplain was requested to go through the bundle, and select such of the publications as, in his opinion, might be usefully circulated among prisoners.

Had such an act of brutal cynicism been played on the average man, he would have probably pitched the periodicals into the dustbin, and ceased to interest himself in the unfortunate creatures for whom he struggled in vain. But Bachelor had a finer temper than the average man. He reflected that a few crumbs are better than no bread at all. He congratulated himself that he had obtained some concession—small though it was—for those whose cause he had been fighting through weary years. He sat down before the bundle, conscientiously read through every magazine contained in it, and made his selection of publications deemed to be “suitable” under the very strict and elaborate instructions laid down by the Office in the covering letter.

And so it happens that the Cameo Room in Verrey's became always associated in my mind with convicts and their champion. In those days a dinner served there was the last word in modern luxury. A big chandelier with the hundred pendent crystals hung from the centre of the ceiling. In mid-Victorian days the chandelier, with its prismatic glass pendants, was regarded as the most swagger thing in the decoration of a saloon. Candles guttered under their red shades, science not having as yet supplied the simple preventive contrivance. The dinner was beyond cavil or criticism. The contents of the cellar had been carefully selected, and its temperature was religiously observed and maintained. But the conditions attendant . . . As the wheels of my taxi turn from the rattle of the Strand and run silent over the rubber pavement on the courtyard of the Savoy, I recognize how far, in some matters, we have travelled in a very few years.

CHAPTER XVII

BOOKIES AND OTHER WILD-FOWL

MEMBERS of the literary staff of a newspaper were, in the far-off and half-forgotten days, deputed to write graphic descriptions of what are known as "the classic events" of the turf. A big newspaper would send as many as three special correspondents to "do" the Derby. One correspondent devoted himself to the journey down by road, a second described the journey by rail, and a third gave an animated pen-sketch of the course. Indeed, some journals, whose motto was "Thorough," were accustomed to send a man to potter about the course the night before the Derby—a writer with the James Greenwood touch, who might be depended upon for a dramatic and humorous column and a half.

Ascot and Goodwood were the other "classic events" to which the descriptive writer would be despatched. Goodwood was always supposed to necessitate the employment of certain venerable clichés. And very old journalists used, therefore, to consider it a great privilege to be sent to that aristocratic meeting. Ascot naturally gave considerable scope to the journalist who flattered himself on an intimate knowledge of Society with a capital "S." For a whole delirious week he never left Society. He watched its menials depart for the Thames Valley on the Sunday before the meeting, and on the Sunday after he was pretty certain to turn up at Boulter's Lock, where some representative ornaments of Society should be on view.

Out of all the men on the daily Press who have been commissioned to attend race-meetings as descriptive writers, I have never known one who became a victim of the betting

habit. Yet I have known several sub-editors whose functions did not take them near a race-course, but whose real business in life seemed to be betting, their sub-editing being regarded as a temporary means of obtaining the original stake which, some day, was to supply the foundation of a fortune. Members of the sporting Press were betting men to a scribe. And so it happened that, no matter what the salary of a writer on the sporting Press might be, he was always in financial difficulties. If these gentlemen, presumably "in the know," found the game unprofitable, what chance should there be, I reflected, for an outsider? Nevertheless, and holding these virtuous views, I have from time to time fallen from grace. These occasional lapses have usually followed a casual bet where the odds have been long and the "tip" has "come off." But eventually the bookies have always got their own back again—and a bit over and above.

This moralizing strain reminds me of the appearance of Robert Buchanan, the poet, as a backer of horses. Some graceless men were inclined to regard the contact of Buchanan with the Ring as something in the nature of a joke. To me it constituted a pitiful and sordid tragedy. Buchanan was another of those men who always wanted money, and who was ever on the lookout for some easy way of getting it. I do not know who it was that introduced him to the turf as a likely method of adding to his resources. But I should not care to be the man with that sin on my soul. If Buchanan knew a horse from a cow, it was about as much as he knew. As to the significance of the weights in a handicap he was entirely ignorant. He had got into his head that by luck and good advice large sums might be made out of the Ring. About twenty years ago I first came across him while he was thus engaged. It was at Epsom the day after the Derby. The grand-stand was but sparsely inhabited. In the interval between the last race and the last but one, I saw Buchanan coming across the course. I went down to meet him. He was in a flurried and excited condition. He had experienced a "rotten" day. Nor was I surprised when he proceeded to explain to me his *modus operandi*. It was this :

He had engaged the services of an infallible tipster. This infallible young person I afterwards discovered to be one of the notorious "boys" of the American Bar of the Criterion, the rendezvous from which the hero of Ardlamont, it will be recollected, chose his associates. For himself and this egregious seer he had taken rooms for the week at the Sun in Kingston, the pair of them driving over to the course each morning in an open landau. As he eagerly explained to me the unsuspected occurrences which had upset the calculations of his adviser, and within how very little he came of pulling off some uncommonly good things, I was profoundly moved. Here was the author of a work of fiction of the quality of "God and the Man," and of poems like "Fra Giacomo," plunging on a race-course with the most sordid motives and with the most ridiculous equipment, and associating with an adviser with whom no self-respecting sportsman would care to be seen talking.

He had a very strong tip for the next race, and he was anxious that I should share in any good fortune that might result from backing it. I looked at my card. Among the starters I saw a horse named Tandragee. I said, half in earnest, that, if I had a bet at all, I should back Tandragee. He inquired very anxiously whether I had heard anything. I assured him that I knew nothing whatever, but that the animal bore the name of "Kim" Mandeville's place in Ireland. Buchanan looked at me reproachfully, as if to suggest that I was treating in a spirit of levity a very serious, and even tragic, business. I made inquiries about Tandragee, and a member of Tattersall's ring laid me ten to one against it. My horse won easily, and Buchanan's "certainty," about which he had only got three to one, was not placed.

With the most ordinary care Robert Buchanan should have acquired a nice little fortune. As it was, he lived in a series of financial straits, and when he paid the debt of nature he left all his other debts undischarged.

My recollections of race-meetings will always be dominated by the figure of Caroline, Duchess of Montrose. I was young and impressionable when I first saw this formidable *grande dame*. I first beheld her on the lawn at Goodwood. She

was accompanied by her husband, Mr. Sterling Crauford, one of the very best and most aristocratic of racing men. Her Grace had a really wonderful vocabulary. She could have debated a point with a bargee starting at even weights. Only once was she talked down. That was by the Thersites of the outer ring—Dick Dunn. This was an Homeric encounter. Rich and rare were the gems in Dick Dunn's armoury of invective. While the battle lasted, it was a veritable interchange of torpedoes. But the vituperative book-maker won, and the Duchess burst into tears.

Caroline, Duchess of Montrose, was once in a towering rage over the defeat of one of her husband's horses, which she had backed heavily, and, as was her wont, she was violently abusing the unhappy boy who had ridden. I rather think it was little Gallon, but am not sure. "You young rascal!" exclaimed the angry Duchess, "did I not tell you to get through and come right away before reaching the bend?"

"Yes, your Grace, you did," blubbered the boy; "b-b-b-but I couldn't come without the horse!"

When Sterling Crauford died, the Duchess selected as her third husband a youth who might have been her grandson.

I have just mentioned Dick Dunn, the bookmaker. This redoubtable penciller was of Irish nationality, his real name being O'Donoghue. He was an extremely good-looking, well-set-up fellow, and, casually encountered, one would never have believed him capable of the heights and depths of picturesque objurgation to which he rose and sank. But he was really a good-natured chap, with a fund of quaint and characteristic humour. I once attended a smoking-concert promoted at Hampton for a charitable purpose, at which Dick Dunn had been asked to preside. Things went very well until a local celebrity—an octogenarian—was called upon to sing. The old man began to intone a very long ballad in very slow time. The audience were getting tired, and the chairman was getting very fidgety. At last the vocalist gave the chairman his opportunity. He was trolling out a fresh verse commencing with the two lines:

"He went into a barber's shop,
There for to get him shaved."

"Well!" roared out Dunn, bringing his hammer sharply down on the table, "what do you suppose he *would* go in for—to *buy onions*?"

The audience broke into laughter, and the abashed warbler sat down.

They tell me that the present is an uncommonly bad time for bookmakers. At the Albert and Victoria they are betting with each other—a tame business, and comparable only (as one of the fraternity recently put it to me) to "kissing one's sister." The occupation of "Oh, yell, oh!" is gone. But in my early Press days he flourished like a green bay-tree. In the early seventies Steele and Peach of Sheffield were the magnates of the Ring. Steele was a big, heavy-faced, sleepy-looking man. He commenced his commercial career by hawking fish through the streets on a barrow. Peach, who was far smarter in appearance, was of equally low origin. The two leviathans of the Ring were closely related by marriage, and ended up by becoming owners of one of the richest steel-works in Sheffield.

I can well remember Olney of Manchester and Steve Mundell of Durham. Olney was a stout, white-haired, red-faced man, who would have been a little one but for the extra weight in fat he carried. He was grumpy, but straight, and his prices were simply awful. Mundell was known as "the Durham Ox." He was, as his sobriquet may suggest, a big, beefy man. His Durham acquaintances were very proud of him; and, indeed, he was not half a bad sort. He was fond of coursing, and kept a few greyhounds of his own.

Our old friend the *Daily Telegraph*, writing about some meeting in a flamboyant style, indulged in an allusion to "the genteel pencillers in the velvet costumes." This chance allusion was the making of Fred Fraser. He and his brother—who clerked for him—always appeared dressed in brown velvet coats, cord breeches, jack-boots, and sombreros. At one time he ran a few horses, but his favourite sport was fishing, and his record exhibition of objurgation was given in connection with the pursuit of this comparatively innocent pastime. This was at Staines. He had left

his line in the water while he went into the town. During his absence a friend fastened a dried haddock to his hook. On his return, the deluded man saw that he had "got a bite," and proceeded to "land." The "air went blue for miles" as the outraged fisherman expressed his opinion of the practical jokers who had tampered with his tackle. Mr. Fraser was, indeed, a gentleman who should have benefited by an extended experience of the silent system; and this he was shortly to have. He was sentenced to a long term for a particularly brutal outrage. And that was the end of "the genteel penciller" so far as Society and the Turf are concerned.

Billy Nicholls of Nottingham was a wealthy man and a "character." He was a member of the Town Council of his native borough, and a rather good yarn used to be told of his action in this capacity when a certain matter of great local interest was brought up before the *Patres Conscripti* of Nottingham. The burning question of "the town pump" had come up in another shape. Public opinion was divided as to whether or not a wall should be built round the cemetery; and, as the municipal elections were at hand, the members of the Council were also much "vexed in their righteous minds" as to how they should vote on the recommendation of the committee. It remained for Billy Nicholls to settle the question by a speech which was brief, to the point, and absolutely convincing:

"Muster Mayor, Haldermen, an' gen'lemen hall," he said, when he rose in his place, "it's like this yer: the pore chaps inside can't get out, and them what's outside don't want to get in. So I says, 'No wall.'"

And "no wall" it was.

Charlie Head was a bookie of a different type. He was dapper, well dressed—in fact, a bit of a dandy. The waxed ends of his moustache were a source of general joy to his friends at a time when this mode of treating what Mr. Frank Richardson would call "face fungi" was comparatively neglected. I first met Head, not on the course, but at the theatre. He was a devoted supporter of the drama, and it was only reasonable that he should look to the drama to

support him. This it very generously did, when the Philharmonic in Islington was turned into a theatre for the production of "Genevieve de Brabant," one of the most popular examples of *opéra bouffe* ever given in England. All the town flocked lightly to the *terra incognita* to see Emily Soldene in her bewitching cook's uniform, just as all the town some years before had flocked to see Marie Wilton and her clever company in the equally unknown little playhouse in Tottenham Street. In his management of the Philharmonic Theatre, at this very profitable period of its history, Head was associated with Charles Morton—a gentleman whose name was never connected with failure.

Tom King, the well-known champion of the prize ring, was also making a book in the seventies. King was a splendid chap, tall, and well set up as a guardsman. His nose was slightly out of drawing—the result, no doubt, of a professional misadventure. When he left the prize ring Tom cultivated a beard and moustache, which were always carefully trimmed. Anything more unlike a "bruiser" it would be impossible to imagine. His "book" was not his only source of income: he enjoyed large profits as a barge-owner. King was a remarkable raconteur, and had a practically inexhaustible collection of yarns, none of them quite suitable for spinning in pages intended for general circulation.

Waterhouse was one of the best of his class. He was a short, fat man, with a funny little *mouche* on his lower lip. With the exception of this spot, his chubby face was clean-shaven. He was a hot-tempered chap, but as straight as a gun-barrel. He had made a hobby of pigeons, of which he was a well-known and eminently successful exhibitor. Waterhouse was commissioner for Lord Bradford's stable, and won, I believe, a lot of money when Sir Hugo, at 40 to 1, beat La Flèche in the Derby of 1892—a date, I should recollect, which lands me two years beyond the chronological limits of these memoirs.

But, to my way of thinking, Charles Brewer was far and away the best of the old bookmakers. He had his offices in Charles Street, St. James's. He was joint owner with Charles Blanton, the trainer of that famous racehorse, Robert the

Devil. Thousands of the British public, as well as the owners, were bitterly disappointed when Robert the Devil failed to pull off the Derby in 1880. The race was won, it will be remembered, by the Duke of Westminster's Bend Or. I saw that exciting finish. It was lost to Robert the Devil owing to the cock-sureness of Rossiter, the jockey. He took matters far too easy, and was imprudent enough to look over his shoulder at the psychological moment. Archer, that king of riders, saw his advantage in a flash, and caught his opponent at the post.

And a curious consideration, not altogether unconnected with psychological ramifications, appeals to me here. When I have been deputed to go to a race-meeting for the purpose of making a column or so of descriptive "copy," the Ring has always presented itself to me as a modern Inferno packed with raucous, foul-mouthed demons—rapacious, brutal, sordid. Again and again have I reeled off impressionist descriptions of what I conceived to be a very brutal exhibition. Yet, in looking back to those old times, the picture of the betting ring does not come back to me as a complete and vivid impression. Faces gaze out at me one by one, and they are all the faces of men who have made their last settlement. One becomes more charitable with the passing of the years, I suppose, and Time teaches us to differentiate. I fail altogether now to recall the Ring as a raging, seething pit. I only recall, with feelings not estranged, some of its members whom I have known, and with whom I have done a little business from time to time. Their manners may not have been those of a Chesterfield, but their principles of commercial morality were more commendable than those of the nobleman whose "Letters," according to honest Samuel Johnson, inculcated the morals of a monkey and the manners of—well, of something even less respectable than our simian ancestor.

But, having said so much in favour of the personal qualities of certain members of the betting ring, and having admitted that the transactions of the fraternity are as a rule honest and open, I venture to suggest that the institution itself is capable of considerable improvement—that, indeed,

the time has come when it might, with benefit to the community and to the Government, be improved off the face of the earth. We are a nation of hypocrites, and are governed by a series of Ministries who play up to our hypocrisy. To certain phases of certain subjects our Government elects to remain blind. By a minority of our countrymen betting is set down as a sin. This minority (many of whom make bets on the sly) has an influence with those in power. Therefore the Government of the day assumes that there is no such thing as wagering for money over horse-racing. The bookmaker is a myth. In the words of Mrs. Gamp, a Minister will tell you, "I don't believe there's no sich a person." And yet what an income is waiting for that Chancellor of the Exchequer who will possess the courage to disestablish the betting ring by instituting the system of *Paris Mutuels*! The "sin" of betting would not be increased thereby, so that the moral minority should not be perturbed. Absolute protection would be afforded to backers, so that the public would be safeguarded and gratified. And the income derivable from commission to the Government would go far towards providing a new *Dreadnought* every year, so that, in any event, the nation must be a gainer.

Mr. Lloyd George might talk the matter over with 'Dr.' Clifford, Mr. Silvester Horne, and the President of the Methodist Conference. The predominant partner—Mr. John Redmond, to wit—would, I am confident, give his consent to an experiment the object of which would be to give some movement to treasuries which have long since ceased to be "flowing."

I once spent some hours in the house of a bookmaker, and had an opportunity of studying the penciller's *ménage*. I had often had a bet with Andy Anderson. His prices were a trifle short, but he was an agreeable man to do business with—jovial, good-tempered, and amusing. After a day's racing at Hurst Park, he overtook "Boris" of the *Referee* and myself, and suggested a "lift" as far as Surbiton—without consulting us as to whether or not Surbiton was on our way home. "Boris"—who in private life was Mr. Harry Bromhead—accepted the invitation. We were given the

back seats on Andy's jobbed landau and pair, the bookie and his clerk facing us, and his "runner" sitting on the box. The carriage eventually drew up at a detached house standing back from an umbrageous front-garden in one of the most highly respectable avenues in Surbiton. The spick-and-span appearance of the façade of the "desirable family residence" suggested the home of a prosperous stockbroker—a class of sportsman then affecting the neighbourhood. Anderson got out, followed by his guests. The landau bowled off with the clerk and the "runner" aboard, and Andy effusively invited us to enter.

We were shown into the drawing-room, where we found Mrs. Anderson—a remarkably fine woman, with much of her husband's easy good temper—petting a remarkably uninteresting mongrel. Then occurred one of those incidents which illustrated a strange boyish side of Andy's character. Having formally introduced us to his wife, he gazed at the dog on her lap with an expression of amazement and admiration, and asked, with great seriousness :

"Where did you get that dog, my dear?"

"Bought him off a man on the tow-path," replied Mrs. Andy.

"What did you give?" he inquired.

"Five shillings."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Andy, "you've had a better day on the tow-path than I've had on the course. Why, that dog is worth fifty quid. You take great care of him, my dear."

"What breed is he?" asked Mrs. Anderson.

"He's a tripe-hound," answered Andy, without moving a muscle, and still regarding the wretched animal with the satisfied air of an expert.

Mrs. Anderson accepted the legend in deadly earnest. The next day, as I afterwards heard, she went into Kingston, purchased a silver collar with her name and address engraved thereon, obtained a lead, and appeared every afternoon on the promenade by the river with her priceless pet. When asked about its pedigree by friends, she explained that she was obliged to take great care of him, as he was a

tripe-hound. It was Bessie Bellwood who eventually "gave the show away." Making a call on Mrs. Anderson, and feeling a curiosity to ascertain why such a woman should make a pet of such an entirely hopeless hybrid, she asked about it, and received the usual reply, given with an air of complacent pride in possession. Bessie's sense of humour was keen, and her expression of it tumultuous. She burst into a fit of irrepressible laughter. Explanations ensued. The tripe-hound was disposed of, and relations between Andy and his wife became somewhat strained.

From the drawing-room, furnished in the most crowded fashion of Early Victorian period, we were conducted to the dining-room, to have what just at that time was becoming known as "a bottle of the boy." Meeting with a book-maker socially always meant in those days a bottle of champagne. The pencillers seemed to swim in it. It is different now. The simple and less expensive whisky-and-soda is regarded by the majority of the Ring as an excellent substitute for the exhilarating vintages of Ay and Épernay, and Grammont. In his own house Andy was the soul of hospitality. He pressed us to remain to dinner. But we both had duties in town. However, we sat listening to his anecdotes and experiences for an hour or more. The most surprising of his reminiscences was that he, Andy Anderson the bookmaker, was the son of a Baptist minister! At first I was inclined to rate the confession with the legend of the tripe-hound, but the statement was one of fact. I commend it to the consideration of Nonconformist Turf-haters; they can take it either of two ways—as an inducement to regard charitably a calling which provides fine openings for the bright sons of Baptist ministers, or as an argument in favour of the *Paris Mutuels*, whereby the temptation to become bookmakers would be for ever removed from the precocious progeny of the "unco' guid."

The mention of Bromhead naturally reminds me of the paper which he served so well for so many years. The *Referer* was established by Henry Sampson some few years after Mr. Corlett found the continuous-paragraph method so sudden and so triumphant a success. But the founders

of the new paper, while appreciating the main reason of their rival's success, were not slow to observe the departments in which the older paper was "slack." So from the start the *Referee* gave a proper attention to arrangement of contents and sub-editing. And the paper is still distinguished for its care in these respects. In a former chapter I have alluded sympathetically to the fact that death has dogged the footsteps of Mr. Corlett's staff. The *Referee* has a more fortunate record. Of the original staff of the *Referee*, four members are still living and working. These are Mr. Richard Butler, Mr. H. Chañce Newton, Mr. Edwards, and Mr. George R. Sims. The "Handbook" on the first page has of recent years become a valued feature. The best of the series was contributed by the patient and reflective Nesbit, of the *Times*. He was followed by Christie Murray. The present writer is Mr. Arnold White, whose range is more limited than that of his predecessors. But he strikes the patriotic note all the time. And the expression of his patriotism never rings false.

In the seventies the *doyen* of the racing Press was Comyns Cole, of the *Times* and the *Field*. In whatever society he might be found Cole was always a striking personality. He was not only an accomplished journalist, but he was a typical English gentleman of the school even then becoming regarded as "old." He possessed all the gracious courtesy of a more formal age. At the time when I made his acquaintance he was well over sixty, but he was erect in carriage, slim in figure, always carefully dressed to suit the occasion, and impartially polite to Dukes and jockeys. His carefully-cultured grey moustache gave him something of a military appearance. His greatest charm was, perhaps, in a voice of unusual sweetness. And on the Turf he was liked and respected by everybody, high and low. Not merely was Cole a gentleman in thought and act, but he spoke and wrote like one. He could never have become contaminated by the baleful influences of the Press-room.

In my early days there were a lot of small race-meetings in the vicinity of London which have ceased to exist, their suppression or extinction, owing to natural causes, being a

circumstance on which Society may be greatly congratulated. Of these, Hampton was one of the most notorious. It was a great Cockney carnival, and was held on the ground over which Hurst Park now stretches. All the costers of the East End drove down to this event on their "flying bedsteads," in the shafts of which conveyances were harnessed their "mokes." On one side of the bedstead, with legs hanging over the front, was the coster, urging his "moke" with comic blasphemies. On the other side sat his "dona," all hat and feathers, howling snatches of the music-hall songs of the moment, and in the intervals plying her "bloke" with beer. All the pickpockets, welchers, thimble-riggers, and confidence-tricksters of the Metropolis turned up at this event, and nowhere else would you be likely to come across scenes of more unbridled blackguardism. The inhabitants of Hampton—standing as it does on one of the prettiest of the nearer reaches of the Thames—were naturally incensed by the annual Saturnalia.

Not all those who were attracted to the meeting came down for the sport. Many of them hired skiffs and went on the water. These greatly daring adventurers had but the most rudimentary use of the sculls, and their immunity from accident can only be traced to that watchful Providence which is believed to look after drunken men and infants. On one occasion I happened during these races to be at Hampton, which is, of course, on the other side of the river. I there saw a rather cranky skiff let out by a local boat-owner to a party of a dozen happy Cockneys, male and female of their kind, not one of whom could row and few of whom could swim. As they zigzagged their way to mid-stream, I thought it my duty to remonstrate with the boat-owner.

"I shouldn't have let a boat to that lot : they're sure to capsize," I ventured to suggest.

"It's orright, guv'nor," answered the man cheerily ;
"I've 'ad a quid deposit !"

Funny thing, the point of view. I was solicitous about the safety of the Cockney excursionists. My boat-hiring friend could only imagine that I was anxious lest his skiff

should come to grief, and was happy to assure me that he had secured himself against all possible loss !

At Kingsbury there was another of these classic events. It was never my proud privilege to witness the racing at Kingsbury ; but the suppression of that meeting was a never-ceasing cause of regret to Warner, of the Welsh Harp, Hendon. I made the acquaintance of that illustrious man when I was sent down to interview Mrs. Girling on the part of a daily paper "whose name shall be nameless," as a villain of melodrama once put it. The name of Mrs. Girling, I imagine, will call up no memories in the present generation. The poor lady, although she made a wonderful commotion in her time, has failed to write her name with any legibility on the page of history.

Mrs. Girling, then, was the president, or high-priestess, or boss of the Shaker community, which at one time thought to establish itself in the country of a hundred religions and one sauce. Notwithstanding all that has been alleged to the contrary, the English still possess a certain sense of humour, and their knowledge of the new sect was chiefly derived from the writings of Artemus Ward, who had devoted a chapter of "His Book" to the more salient eccentricities of the Shakers. One of the sect he described as looking like "a last year's bean-pole dressed in a long meal-bag."

The corybantic religionists who had come across the Atlantic with Mrs. Girling in the pious hope of converting the islanders had been evicted from their quarters in the New Forest, and had encamped on, and under, the grandstand on the Kingsbury racecourse. The expulsion of the Shakers from their Hampshire Eden became the subject of a great deal of comment in the Press, and Warner, who was above all else a showman, at once saw his way to make some money out of the eccentric exiles from the States. So he philanthropically offered the evicted evangelists such shelter as the Kingsbury grandstand afforded. Mrs. Girling was grateful. Half London flocked to Hendon to inspect the high-priestess and her faithful following of Latter-Day Saints, and, incidentally, to partake of refreshments at the

Welsh Harp. It was on my way home after my interview with Mrs. Girling that I made the acquaintance of Mr. Warner himself. He was a large, jovial, effusive person—quite the typical Boniface, in fact. I was about to write “the typical John Bull,” when I recollected that the national nickname has acquired associations which render it—well, not quite typical.

Warner appeared to spend most of his time sitting in a wooden armchair of Brobdingnagian proportions. When in an anecdotal or reminiscent mood, he could be extremely entertaining. One of his reminiscences may be worth repeating. The Welsh Harp pleasure-grounds had become a favourite arena for the managers of Sunday-school treats and high jinks of a similar character. During the summer months thousands of children were carted down from the lanes and alleys of the town to pick daisies in Warner’s fields, to wander by the margin of Warner’s lake, and to “wolf” Warner’s buns and ginger-beer amid delightfully rural surroundings. Consternation, therefore, seized this particular section of Society when there appeared in the papers the report that the pet bear of the Welsh Harp had escaped from its den, and had taken refuge in some neighbouring thicket. In vain did Warner write solemn disclaimers to the daily papers. His pathetic denials of the existence of any bear on the estate were received with frigid scepticism. The rumour had been sown broadcast, and had taken root. The crop was accepted as first-class fact. The more strongly did Warner protest, the more picturesque became the newspaper reports of the bear-hunt, the methods of the trackers, and their failure to trap their quarry.

Meanwhile the outlook was becoming serious for the owner of the famous pleasure. Every post brought the poor man letters from the promoters of bean-feasts and Sunday-school treats cancelling their dates. In moments of desperation the brain sometimes becomes superactive. At such a moment Warner was the subject of an inspiration, or, as he himself put it, “an ‘appy thought struck him.” He drove off to Jamrach’s, the famous dealers in wild animals, in the Ratcliff Highway, and there he purchased the cheapest

bear in the market. The brute was taken to the Welsh Harp in a van and at dead of night. The following morning the animal was found tied up to a tree in the grounds, and Warner triumphantly issued to the Press a purely imaginary account of its pursuit and capture. The consequences of the ruse were satisfactory all round. Nobody seemed to remember anything at all of Warner's pathetic denials of the existence of a bear. The accuracy of the Press reporters was vindicated, and the publication of Warner's circumstantial account of the chase and capture attracted thousands of sightseers to the Welsh Harp—most of them thirsty. In a few days the ingenious designer of this public deception was able to recoup himself for the losses sustained owing to the alleged ravages of an ursine "Mrs. Harris" by the production of a real bear—a hired, harmless, and humiliated brute.

Time has been kind to the old Welsh Harp, and I fervently hope that the day is far distant ere even a garden city shall be established by the shores of the wonderful lake whereon the Cockney sailed and fished in the summer, and skated—and was periodically immersed—in the winter months. For a little while at least its memory will be kept green by Chevalier's "Coster's Serenade":

" You ain't forgotten yet that night in May
 Dahn at the Welsh 'Arp, which is 'Endon way ?
 You fancied winkles and a pot of tea ;
 ' Four 'alf,' I murmured, ' 's good enough for *me*.
 Give me a word of 'ope that I may win.'
 You prods me gently with the winkle pin.
 We was as 'appy as could be that day
 Dahn at the Welsh 'Arp, which is 'Endon way."

CHAPTER XVIII

OLLA PODRIDA

Two American managers had made themselves very well known to the Street of Adventure in the early eighties. It was before the advent of the mighty Frohman and other engineers of the great combine. The one was known as "Johnny" Rogers, and the other was W. W. Kelly. The last-named gentleman must be, I imagine, still to the fore, for during the last General Election I visited two provincial centres, and saw, peeling from the walls of each, the mammoth posters of that wonderful Napoleonic melodrama "A Royal Divorce." I wonder whether, if the spirit of my old friend, W. G. Wills, revisited these "glimpses of the moon," he would recognize his workmanship and marvel at sight of the crowds it still attracts.

Kelly was a tall, florid man, flamboyant in manner, and gifted with an eloquence which was never ungarnished. Rogers was a little man, with a nice taste in diamonds. The time that he did not spend in the theatre writing Press notices about his "star" was devoted to running around the newspaper offices seeking publicity for his lucubrations.

Rogers managed for a little lady called Minnie Palmer, who appeared at the Strand Theatre in a sort of pinafore-and-golden-curls part. She continued playing the pinafore *ingénue* until she was well over forty. Poor little "Johnny," who had taught the lady all she knew, was quite broken-hearted when she left his for another management. Kelly also made his reputation in London as manager for an actress. This performer was called Grace Hawthorne. Miss Hawthorne took the Olympic and the Princess's, and spent

quite a fortune in the attempt to establish the position of her theatres.

Kelly had a humour of his own, which, if Irish in its origin, was American in its expression. In the Junior Garrick Club one afternoon some men were assembled in the hall (the hall-porter, called "Tap," was a bit of a bookmaker, and we loyally accepted his ridiculous prices). The conversation turned on lying, and some of us were relating our experiences of great liars whom we had known, and quoting examples of their skill. Kelly entered during the recital with a member whose guest he was, and listened quietly for a while ; then, taking advantage of the first pause, he said :

" I guess what you fellows know about lyin' ain't worth a cent. There are only three liars in the world. . . . is one, *and Rogers is the other two.*"

When Wilson Barrett produced Mr. Caine's " Ben My Chree " at the Princess's, Kelly had some rights in either the piece or the theatre. After the first performance, Kelly went round to Barrett's dressing-room, and urged the actor to cut down the dialogue before again presenting the piece. The critics, Kelly assured him, were very much annoyed by the length of some of the speeches. " Don't you believe it," replied Barrett reassuringly. " To-morrow morning every paper in London will have over a column of unadulterated praise, and the booking-office will be besieged by a public mad to buy seats !"

In relating the incident to me, Kelly concluded thus :

" And Wilson Barrett was right. The following morning they brought the papers up to my bedroom. *Times*, a solid column of sugar-candy ; *Telegraph*, a column and a quarter of molasses, laid on thick ; *Post*, syrup suited for Society. I dressed in a hurry, raced through my breakfast, ordered a hansom, and told the man to drive like the devil to the Princess's Theatre. I was anxious to see the queue waiting to book, as discerned in the prophetic vision of my actor-managerial confrère. Never before did the journey from St. John's Wood to Oxford Street appear so long. It was just on noon when we passed through Oxford Circus, but by the time we passed Peter Robinson's I could see a crowd

gathered in front of the theatre. 'By Cræsus, Barrett's right again !' I said to myself as I paid the cabby and turned to enter the house ; and then the horrible truth burst upon me. The crowd was entirely composed of Wilson Barrett's creditors !"

There was very little *pose* about the pressman of the jocund days. There was an editorial *pose*, of course—that was as essential as an ecclesiastical or as a judicial *pose*—but among the rank and file nothing of the sort was known, and nothing of the sort would have been tolerated. Journalists were like so many schoolboys grown up, and affectations of all kinds were an abomination to them ; yet the seed for some of the artistic make-believe which is now so widespread was sown in an earlier and, I venture to think, a more healthy time.

Thus, what a mighty growth of rank vegetation has followed the discovery by Swinburne of Fitzgerald's paraphrase of the "Rubaiyat" of Omar Khayyâm ! Swinburne's "find" in Quaritch's shop was, perhaps, the most important event that ever took place there. From a commercial point of view the transaction was naught, for the neglected verses were rescued by the poet from the "All these at twopence" box of the expert in old editions. Nor was there anything at all sensational in the circumstance of one poet lighting upon the undiscovered genius of a brother bard. One can understand Swinburne's keen delight and sympathetic appreciation, but what of the rising flood of slushy adulation which has followed on the part of men who are without literary discrimination or poetic insight ? The names of eminent members of the Press appear in the lists of those assembled to do honour to the memory of the Persian voluptuary. This is a pity, I think. To be in harmony with their object, these celebrations should be orgies, and as long as they are conducted on any other lines they should be left to the professors of a vapid dilettantism.

Omar Khayyâm had a fine sense of humour, and, scanning mundane affairs from his retreat in Paradise, he must sometimes shake with laughter as he regards the class of admirers who assemble and meet together, drinking to his memory,

sending roses to be planted on his grave, and ruffling it for a night in the character of irresponsible roisterers. There is a touch of the comic about the situation that just redeems it ; otherwise, it were pitiful. What on earth does old Omar make in that galley ? The dominant note of the diners is that of a stifling modernity. The purveyors of literary gossip are here, with the prurient and the anæmic, and the few normal persons who are present are here from a mere desire to gratify their curiosity or their gregariousness. All are in the attire decreed by social convention for functions of the sort. Many of them wear spectacles. When the hour strikes, and the operation of the Licensing Act compels them to bring their feast to an end, they " taxi " off to their suburban villas, where they pay rates and elect Borough Councillors. Here they are " waited up for " by their faithful wives, middle-aged and highly respectable matrons, to whom, with more or less lucidity, they relate all they have been doing and saying in honour of a lusty human animal of primeval instincts, who, had he any " say " in the matter, would eloquently resent the familiarity which is being taken with his name by persons with whom he could never have had anything in common.

And this reflection reminds me of an incident related to me by Sala. He told it of James Hannay. That accomplished writer was a great admirer of the works of Horace, and on December 8—the poet's birthday—he gave a dinner in honour of his favourite author. At these annual assemblies the majority of the guests were men having a scholarly acquaintance with the writings of Quintus Horatius Flaccus. On one of these anniversaries it happened that the scholarly persons were all prevented from attending, and Hannay found himself surrounded at dinner by friends whose knowledge of Horace, if anything at all, was of a schoolboy and negligible kind. It was Hannay's custom on these occasions to propose one toast—" The Memory of Horace." He rose to make his customary address, which he brought to a conclusion in the following words :

" Would that the great poet were with us now ! Here he would tell us of his Venusian home under the shadow of

the Apulian Hills ; here he would explain the recondite personal allusions in his ' Satires ' ; here he would lift the veil from his inner life in quoting passages from the ' Epistles ' ; here he would recite, as only he could, his lighter or his graver ' Odes,' happily conscious of the fact that not one person in his hearing understood a word of the language in which he was speaking !"

And, according to Sala, no one resented the pleasantry.

It may be assumed that Hannay was more exercised about the memory of Horace than he was about his own. One never hears him quoted now ; yet he established a claim on the memory of posterity far more valid than that of a score of writers who have become accepted as speaking with authority. His " Satire and Satirists " proves him to be as fine a master of satire as many of those with whom he deals. His " Singleton Fontenoy " is full of wit and humour, and the shrewd wisdom of a thorough man of the world. He wrote largely in the *Quarterly Review*, was a contributor to *Punch*, and a regular writer on the Press. There is no English critic to whose pages I revert with keener satisfaction ; but that taste is not general. Hannay, alas ! has written his name in water.

Charles Reade wrote one of the greatest novels produced in the Victorian era—I refer, of course, to " The Cloister and the Hearth "—and he was probably one of the greatest personalities of his own time. I knew him fairly well. Like Robert Buchanan, he was ready to rush into newspaper correspondence on the slightest provocation, and, having once commenced operations, he hit out in a way that was perfectly wonderful ; yet—again like poor Buchanan—he was a man with a soft heart and a generous nature. He would roar through a whole column, hurling at his opponent the most weird and lurid denunciations, but he bore no malice. He was afflicted now and then with righteous indignation, but once the steam was let off, he cooed like a sucking-dove. In the height of his argument he would coin the most wonderful phrases, for Reade never raged as the heathen rage. Tom Purnell " had at " the old gentleman in the *Athenæum*, and Reade was out after his scalp in

rather less than no time. His philippic on this occasion incidentally enriched the English language by the addition of a word. "Pseudonymuncule" was the epithet which he forged for the confusion of his opponent.

Reade was a big burly man, with a grey beard, short clipped. Henry Byron once described him as "Great Briton," and the phrase was apt enough. A tumultuous, overwhelming personage was Reade. His advertisements to "Thief Takers," offering rewards to those who caught unscrupulous persons pirating his works, were surely the "maddest, merriest" things ever set up in type; yet they were quite seriously meant by their author. On the subject of piracy he was always in deadly earnest. One of his last contributions to the Press was a series of articles in the *Daily Telegraph* on "Ambidextrous Man." On this subject he waxed as emphatic, insistent, and eloquent as if the world were arrayed in one great stupid conspiracy against his contention. As a matter of fact, the world did not care a farthing about it one way or the other. Perhaps his most dramatic exhibition of violent indignation was afforded when the authorities wanted to acquire his house at Albert Gate. Among other devices to which he resorted in order to bring his persecutors to their senses was a very characteristic one. He had a huge board affixed to the forefront of his dwelling, and painted thereon, for all the world to see, was the legend: "NABOTH'S VINEYARD." One would have imagined that this would have stricken his enemies with a sense of shame. In that direction, however, I regret to say, it failed.

When the prize-ring was set up between four walls, and its contests decided after dinner before a mob of gentlemen in evening dress, its chief London home was, and is, the National Sporting Club. The National Sporting Club was not the direct descendant of the prize-ring, but came to the sons of men by way of the West London Rowing Club, in connection with which there was a boxing-club supported by such sportsmen as "Pills" Holloway, "Nobby" Hall, and other gentlemen pugilists. The umpires, referees, and time-keepers at the National Sporting Club had graduated

at the West London, which had its premises on the tow-path by Putney Bridge. The chief of these were Mr. "Jack" Angle, Mr. Vyse, and Mr. "Tom" Anderson, of the Board of Trade. All three were men of dress and of address—what used to be called "swells," in fact—and Anderson was always noted for the wonderful depth of his linen collars; indeed, he may be said to have set that fashion in collars which a few years since bid fair to strangle the rising hope of England. Whenever a boxing contest came off at the National Sporting, the names of these three veterans of the gloves appeared in the newspapers publishing reports of the "fights." When Sir Courtney Boyle became Chief of the Board of Trade, he was scandalized to find the name of a gentleman holding an important position in the office appearing publicly in such a degrading connection, and Anderson was tabled, and informed that if he wished to retain his position he must abandon all official connection with the "ring." Anderson's resentment may, perhaps, be found expressed in the fact that shortly afterwards Sir Courtney became known in Whitehall as "Doubtful Boyle." On being asked the meaning of the sobriquet, Anderson would slyly answer: "The chief is so called because he is always in doubt as to whether godamighty made him or he made godamighty!"

When the National Sporting Club was yet unthought of, and when the premises they occupy was still Evans's Hotel, there was a tobacconist's shop next door, and behind the shop there was an American bowling-alley. This was Kilpack's. It was an old-fashioned shop, and the customers sat on tobacco-barrels beside the counter. The bowling-alley was not much frequented when I knew it; but earlier in the nineteenth century it had a vogue, I understand. It was a capital alley, and I have enjoyed many a game there with citizens of the United States, who did not, I am bound to confess, take much stock in the pastime. Behind the counter of the cigar-shop was a middle-aged man, very genial and reminiscent. The customers always called him "Kilpack," and he always "answered" to that name; but the original Kilpacks had disappeared long before, and this

amiable person—probably a Smith or a Jones—thought it a safe policy to carry on the old traditions under the old name. Kilpack's was

“ A link within the days to bind
The generations each to each.”

As I see these old landmarks disappear one by one from the face of the Metropolitan area, I experience a pang of bereavement as at the death of an old friend. The site upon which the demolished Kilpack's once stood is now occupied by the premises of a draper.

I never had much to do with the money-lending fraternity. I tried on one occasion to borrow fifty of Sam Lewis. I may mention at once that I did not succeed. But my visit on the occasion to 17, Cork Street established a friendship between Sam and myself which continued until his death. I have heard a good many stories about the rapacity of Sam in his professional capacity. His critics forget to estimate the risks which he continually took, and when one remembers the sort of men his principal “clients” were, and the eventual destination of the millions which the worthy Sam accumulated, it must be admitted that the public has benefited by the transactions. Had the vast sums of interest which Sam Lewis hauled in from clients like Ailesbury percolated through other channels, Society would not have been a halfpenny the better. As it was, the Lewis millions went in the end to benefit hospitals and other great public charities. Sam left a lot to be disposed of in this way, leaving the bulk of his little savings to his wife. That lady did not survive her husband by many years, and her will added enormously to the benefactions devised by her husband. In the testamentary acts of both husband and wife the Christian charities were as liberally treated as were those distinctively Jewish.

Lewis was a dapper, well-dressed little man, with a bald head and a smile of winning quality; indeed, all Sam's qualities were winning qualities. His offices were on the first-floor of the house next door to the Blue Posts in Cork Street, and impecunious *flâneurs* emerging from the Burlington Arcade were often blessed by a sight of the back of

Sam's head as he leaned against the window talking to some "forlorn and shipwrecked brother" intent on discovering the wherewithal on which to "take heart again."

Lewis began life as a traveller in real and sham jewellery, to which he added, as time went on, some little adventures on his own account in the tally-man arena of British enterprise. The most melancholy young man I ever saw was his clerk—one Gilbey by name. Whether this young man's melancholy was constitutional or was caused by his acquaintance with the seamy side of Society, or by the monotonous filling up of bills for Sam's clients to sign, I never could make out. Sam's chief jackal was one Alfred Snelling, whose office was in a little house looking down Savile Row.

Not often have the betting ring and the tipsters and "the boys" generally come across so soft a thing as they found in Ernest Benzon, whose meteoric course lasted just two years. It must be confessed that this extraordinary young man contrived to fill the public eye during that period to the exclusion of more useful subjects, and it cost him just a quarter of a million of money to achieve that splendid notoriety. The fortune to which Benzon—known during his brief career on the turf as "the Jubilee Juggins"—succeeded was made by his father, a Birmingham man. The trade by which it was accumulated was that of constructing umbrella-frames. That a fortune thus made should have been inherited by one who was utterly oblivious to the necessity of laying by something for a rainy day strikes a reflective person as being at once strange and sad. Benzon did not acquire the sobriquet "Juggins" for nothing. He was the last man in the world to whom the control of a fortune should have been committed.

Benzon was absolutely vain, frivolous, and assertive. He fancied himself no end at things for which he had no very great aptitude. As an instance of this, I remember quite well how he challenged John Roberts at pyramids for a sovereign a ball. Of course, Roberts "took him on," with what result can be imagined. He had that sort of sickly sentimentality which may be encountered in the sixpenny gallery of the homes of melodrama—a sentimentality which

can exist in natures incapable of any quite genuine emotion. Benzon squandered money, and doubtless was robbed of money ; but I have never heard a case in which he spent money on a generous impulse or with the intention of doing an act of solid benefit to an individual or to the human race. Yet I accompanied him on one occasion to the Adelphi Theatre. A melodrama of the ordinary Adelphi sort was being played, and Benzon became so extremely touched by the sufferings of the heroine that he began blubbering like a child. Nor can it be said that the exhibition was explicable on the ground that the " Juggins " was " crying drunk."

When Benzon had melted his patrimony of a quarter of a million, he thought to maintain his notoriety by telling the world how he had managed to do it. To this motive may be attributed the appearance of a book attributed to him, and entitled, " How I Lost £250,000 in Two Years." His friends now considered that a new and reputable career was opened up to him ; for the work was extremely well written, and the " Jubilee Juggins " accepted with never-failing geniality the congratulations which were showered upon him. But even here Benzon was fated to be a disappointment to his friends. Some months after the book appeared an action was brought against the publisher by Vero Shaw. From the evidence given during the hearing it transpired that, save for the two words " Ernest Benzon " which appeared under his likeness opposite the title-page, not a scrap of the work had been done by the " Juggins " himself. It was all the work of Vero Shaw, constructed out of such flimsy materials as could be gathered from the vapid conversation of the devoted plunger and the diary of the latter's tutor.

The last time I saw Benzon he was somewhat less of the butterfly than in the days of his vanity. He was living on an inalienable income paid weekly. His salient qualities were selfishness and silliness. He was what " bookies " used to call " a fly-flat," and, I may add, more flat than fly.

Saturday-to-Mondaying became recognized as having a place among British sports and pastimes some time at the close of the seventies, I think. It was started, like so many

other delightful innovations, by Bohemians. Having once "caught on," it was adopted by Society, and in quite recent years became recognized under the name which it originally and naturally bore. But though Society has sanctioned—or shall I say sanctified?—the term, the first public allusion to the beneficent custom was on the stage of the music-hall, and was made by Miss Marie Lloyd or another. The stimulating refrain ran: "Oh, will you be my Saturday-to-Monday?"

Charles Wyndham was one of the first of the theatrical profession to recognize in the Thames Valley a peaceful resort in which, after the Saturday performance, to rest and study and contrive. It was at a very critical period in the history of the Criterion, and the ambitious manager—surely the finest of English comedians—was suffering all the horrors of insomnia. Affairs were balanced on the edge of a knife, as it were, at the theatre, and it was doubtful whether the courageous young manager could hold on or not. His objective in those days was the Swan, at Thames Ditton, and here for the greater part of Sunday he would shut himself up in a private room studying manuscript plays, French and English of their kind. All who knew him then rejoiced when a brilliant success at last followed his judgment in selection, and the anxiety and the insomnia simultaneously disappeared. Those who have only known him in later years as the rich and popular Sir Charles Wyndham will learn that his success—like all solid and lasting successes—was strenuously won.

But it was not until a later period that the general week-end migration of Bohemia to the Thames set in with yearly increasing severity. And those who followed Wyndham to the river of pleasure did not, you may be quite sure, follow his example in the matter of arduous study. A good deal of "shop" was talked, no doubt, at the merry forgatherings of actors in flannels and actresses in white frocks—actors will pass their time in heaven talking "shop"—but serious consideration of the business of the theatre was as a rule taboo. The spirit of the little assemblages of friends all along the Valley was frankly a holiday spirit; the dominant

note of the Bohemian parties was gaiety. The Saturday-to-Monday establishments spread themselves from Twickenham—then below locks—to Datchet. Nowadays the profession may be found encamped higher up the stream. But there were no motors in the dark days of which I am writing, and players whose engagements were in or near the Strand were limited to the river resorts served by the South-Western Railway Company. Whatever disadvantages may have been incident on this limitation, it had the advantage of placing the week-enders from the theatres within visiting distance of each other.

D'Oyly Carte hired a big house at Hampton, close to Tagg's Island, where he entertained largely on Sundays. It had a lawn running down to the river—a lawn on which I have met some very pleasant people, but none as pleasant and unassuming as Carte himself, or more hospitable and gracious than his talented wife. Carte evidently regarded the Thames as an ideal stream by which to live, for he afterwards bought an eyot higher upstream, and built a house on it.

Higher up the stream, at Sunbury, there was a cheery Bohemian colony where the fun never flagged. "Cis" Chappel's cottage by the river was one of the centres of the settlement. Among his visitors—also of the colony—were Captain Fred Russell, whose quaint humour and whose fame as a raconteur were enhanced by a slight stammer, which, instead of marring, heightened his effects. Alfred Benjamin, of bulldog fame, was free of this circle, in virtue of having "married on to the stage," so to speak, Mrs. Benjamin having been one of the vestals who had kept burning Hollingshead's "sacred lamp of burlesque" at the Gaiety. Other bright and beautiful women were among Chappel's visitors, chief among these being Miss Nellie Farren, who had a residence not far off, and whose presence and fine flow of animal spirits prevented the possibility of any dull moments. The Magpie Hotel, with a landing-stage to the river, was a famous gathering place for the members of the theatrical profession, more especially on Sunday afternoons. Old Freeman, the landlord, has long since abandoned Clarke's ferry for that

of Charon. He had the general appearance of a stage-butler—artificial smirk and all—and he made a nice fortune by catering for the gay and irresponsible youth who frequented his establishment.

Still farther upstream was Shepperton. Here of a morning the handsome Harry B. Conway might be seen leaving his cottage, preceded by the two noisiest collies ever littered. Conway, surely the best-looking Romeo who ever played the part, was a connection of the Byron family, and possessed all the good looks of his famous relative. It is to be feared that he inherited also some of the other idiosyncrasies of the author of "Don Juan." Henry Pottinger Stephens had for some time a house farther inland from the river. He had hired the place furnished. The grounds were surrounded by a high wall, the visitor at the gate being scanned through a grille before admission. The retreat was as private as a nunnery. Once inside, "Pot's" visitor would be struck by the excessive number of copies of the Holy Scriptures which were to be found in the rooms. It used to amuse "Pot" to stimulate the curiosity of his guests on this point, and then to explain the mystery by observing that he had hired the house of Mr. Bagster, the Bible publisher of Paternoster Row.

Above the lock, and on the Chertsey side of the river, Sir Charles Dilke had built himself the most retired little bungalow on all the river. Neither from the stream nor from the shore approaches was the house visible. It seemed to be sunk in osier-beds and embowered in willows. Theodore Hook I think it was who described the advantage of having a riverside cottage as consisting in the fact that "in the summer you had the river at the bottom of your garden, and that in the winter you had the garden at the bottom of your river." I should imagine that in the winter, not only the garden, but the house itself, must sometimes have been at the bottom of the river in the case of Sir Charles Dilke's Chertsey home.

At Staines "Tommy" Brett, a member of the Bar, conspicuous for his negligence in the matter of dress, had his week-end quarters. He practised on the Chancery side, and was half mad on the subject of horse-racing. To hear and

see Tommy describe a close finish was one of the funniest entertainments possible. In his excitement, the little man would get down to his work, his wrists and elbows playing, his knees pressed in, his neck craned forward, and his hat pressed to the very back of his head. Brett was in deadly earnest all the time, while to his audience the performance appealed as a piece of the most extraordinary burlesque. Fortunately, Tommy's knowledge of law was much more sound than his knowledge of horse-racing. On the other side of the river to Staines is Egham Hythe, and here Vero Shaw had a pleasant establishment known as Wapshot Farm. The author of "The Book of the Dog" was here experimenting in pigeon-breeding, and at Wapshot Farm there was always a warm welcome to friends on the part of the most cheery of hosts and the most hospitable of hostesses. Mrs. Shaw was noted on the Staines reach, and on reaches above and below it, for her success as a Thames angler.

With the advent of the house-boat an era of greater luxuriousness was inaugurated. At first the house-boat was a floating structure of small proportions and humble pretensions—the home of some artist or some devoted lover of the Thames who had become tired of camping out. But the possibilities of the thing were soon gauged by those to whom money was not very much of an object. The first of the house-boats on a really large and luxurious scale was built for Mr. O'Hagan of Hampton by Tom Tagg. Once the game was started, it went on merrily, and continueth even unto this day, although the motor has diverted many of the wealthy from a pastime which, from one point of view at least, must be regarded as "slow." Colonel North, the Nitrate King, as they called him in the City, set up a house-boat on a grand scale. He called her *The Golden Butterfly*, and on board this gorgeous floating pleasure-house he gave princely entertainments to the ornaments of the stage and his City friends. John L. Shine, the actor, had gained the good graces of the egregious Nitrate King—who, while recklessly hospitable, was hopelessly vulgar—and he did a lot of the inviting for the florid and red-whiskered magnate. Where City men of the "Woolpack" type, ladies of the theatre, unlimited cham-

pagne, and a host free of any bigoted regard for the *convenances*, are the chief elements of a gathering, the fun should have been fast and furious—as, indeed, it sometimes was.

William Hudson, the wine-merchant, had a house-boat right away from the more crowded reaches of the Thames. She lay off the Mapledurham meadows, belonging to the Blount family. Hudson's boat was called *The Little Billee*, and he kept moored near by an excellent steam-launch, the *Marillet*, and a whole flotilla of skiffs, punts, and canoes for the use of his visitors. In the internal fittings of the *Little Billee* Hudson went in not so much for airy grace as for solid comfort. And no man on all the Thames gave better week-end dinners. He liked to have around him guests who could talk, and who could talk well. 'All sorts and conditions of people met at his board, but one never met there a man who was not interesting. Travellers, authors, journalists, merchants, Conservative Members of Parliament, and Irish Nationalist Members of the same august assembly, I have met at Hudson's week-end parties on the *Little Billee*. And if the after-dinner talk was always kept up to the right conversational pitch, much of the credit was due to the keenness and tact of a host who delighted in the conversational "give and take" of clever men.

On the upper and on the lower reaches of the Thames the upper and the lower reaches of literature—if I may so describe them—were represented. Thus, at Kelmscott, by Lechlade, Rossetti and Morris were producing enduring work; while down at Isleworth Mr. Le Queux was reporting at County Courts and Boards of Guardians for the *Middlesex Chronicle*, innocent as yet of the many sensational crimes which, in six-shilling volumes, he has since committed; and at Richmond Mr. Bloundelle Burton was daily treading on historic ground without so much as contemplating the historic novel. At Teddington, Blackmore, having abandoned Devonshire and the novel of the West, was devoting himself to the pleasurable and profitable pursuit of market gardening. All sorts and conditions of the cultivators of literature sought the banks of the Thames; and if Edmund Yates, of

the *World*, had a delightful place at Goring, Purkiss, of the *Police Gazette*, had a still more luxurious home at Shepperton.

In the eighties, too, the river began to have a literature of its own. Of these, *Lock to Lock* lingers on to this day. The *Thames* was a more serious and a more pretentious paper. It was under the editorship of one of the Mackays—William, I think—and to its powerful and continuous advocacy the public are indebted for the lock below Richmond, an improvement which can only be appreciated by those who can remember the exposed bed of the river between Isleworth and Teddington at the height of a hot summer. During one such year it was possible to walk across that part of the river which was supposed to run between Twickenham foreshore and Eel Pie Island.

To one who comes early under the subtle influence of the Thames there is no other water which shall ever possess the same attraction. One falls in love with it, and thereafter can see only its perfections. No stream has been so celebrated in verse. From Spenser and Drayton to Cowley and Pope, from Cowley and Pope to Matthew Arnold and Theo Marzials, there stretches a long list of illustrious versifiers who found inspiration in the Thames. And if Pope might so exaggerate the objects of his poetic vision as to behold “. . . the Muses sport on Cooper’s Hill,” the more modern bard, Mr. Theo Marzials, may be forgiven for metamorphosing the Twickenham ferryman. The song presents that waterman as a dashing young Lothario. The unhappy fact is that, at the time when Marzials wrote the once popular song, the ferryman was a fat, oleaginous old man named Cooper, with no sentiment of any kind about him save a sentimental feeling for beer.

Through all my memories of the journalistic life the Thames sings softly. When I look back, a thousand delightful recollections of its bosom and its banks inevitably obtrude, even while I try to concentrate on the busy haunts of men. “Sweete Temmes !”

CHAPTER XIX

THE PRESS IN TRANSITION

“ Old familiar declining and falling off.”—SILAS WEGG.

“ ALL things earthly,” said the wit, “ have an end—except Upper Wimpole Street.” And the end of the Press has been cheerfully foretold by the Jeremiahs of Fleet Street. So obvious, I have been recently informed, have become the symptoms of disintegration and decay in the institution known under the style and title of “ The Daily Press ” that the publicist who would call attention to the fact must be prepared to hold himself rather cheap.

Now, it is almost a truism to say that there is in the older members of any profession an intuition which compels them to regard their own early days in a calling as indicating the high-water mark of that vocation, whatever it may have been. The reason for this curious attitude of the human mind is not very far to seek. To parody Lytton, “ the youthful and the beautiful are one.” And a profession regarded by one who is young, ardent, impressionable, and credulous, will not appear the same thing to him when he views it, in its new developments, with old eyes and in a spirit of detachment. That which differs in the new constitution from the conditions of the old he will regard as bad or puerile or reactionary. The old things he sees through a golden haze; the new he regards with the rheumy eyes of the valetudinarian.

In the old newspaper man this instinct to depreciate the present I have found very strong. His pose is invariably that of the *laudator temporis acti*. In all its departments and through all its methods he observes what Wegg calls “ the Decline-and-Fall-Off ” of the daily paper. Old actors are very much like old pressmen in this respect. Their

early days were always "the palmy days." And as there have always been living old actors to impress this fact on the minds of successive generations, it is obvious that all time, past and present, was and is that blessed period known as "the palmy days."

But while I do not note in the newspaper Press, as it exists to-day, those signs of disintegration and wasting—that "old familiar declining and falling off"—which have been diagnosed by aged professors, I do observe the passing of certain stages of the evolution of the newspaper; and I can even read in those indications the foretaste of a time when the newspaper, as we know it now, will have ceased altogether to exist.

I will endeavour to explain.

It is not alleged by our Jeremiah that the newspapers have "declined and fallen off" in circulation. I write without statistics and making a mere intelligent guess when I estimate that there are at least four times as many copies of newspapers sold in a day in London now as were sold in 1870. Here, at least, there is no indication of decline; and if there be anything at all in the law of supply and demand, we are bound to infer that the proprietors of newspapers must be supplying that which the public demands. Public taste is not created or directed by newspapers. The clever editor is he who shrewdly anticipates the direction of the public taste, and caters for it. It is a *flair* which the editor may possess in common with the theatrical manager and the *restaurateur*. He exercises it in exactly the same way as George Edwardes exercises it or as "Jo" Lyons exercises it. "Find out what the fool of a public wants, and give it to 'em!" was the advice given me once by the managing director of a syndicate of newspapers of the North of England. And it was sound advice.

If this view of the whole duty of the modern editor be correct, it involves the admission that the newspaper of to-day has abandoned its ancient traditions, just as it has thrown aside the worn-out clichés. Half the disgust of the journalistic Jeremiah with the new order is caused, I believe, by the abandonment of those time-honoured clichés. He endures a pang of regret and resentment when, in reading

the account of a fire, he finds no allusion to "the devouring element." He is incapable of understanding that the public does not care any more for "the devouring element," and that the penny-a-liner has been superseded by the crime investigator and other weird officials called into existence by the new reader of newspapers.

When our poor old Jeremiah was young, the newspaper was, primarily, the organ of a party—sometimes its official organ, but always, whether officially or unofficially, representing one of the great political parties. Nominally, indeed, it is so still. But there is no underlying enthusiasm, nor is there any continuity of conviction. Many of our "esteemed contemporaries" are, ostentatiously, rail-sitters. But the Press has ceased to have any influence with Cabinets, nor are editors any longer consulted by Cabinet Ministers. No editor will ever again hold the position with regard to Ministers held by Dr. Giffard of the *Morning Herald*, or John Delane of the *Times*. By the way, the Conservative party owed a great deal more than they were ever willing to acknowledge to the said Dr. Giffard. I suppose that they considered that they had wiped out the debt when they made his son Lord Chancellor and an Earl! One of these days we shall find politics left out of our papers save at election times, when the space will be hired by persons wishing to advertise their political convictions.

The new conditions under which the newspaper exists, and the new methods introduced by its conductors, were foreordained, though not foreseen, when Mr. Forster's Education Bill became law, and the School Board education was offered to the youth of merry England. Paterfamilias bought his newspaper in the dark ages before Forster. The generations that developed under Forster's Act demanded newspapers of their own, but they were not prepared to pay a penny for them. And, lo! the halfpenny Press arose at his bidding—the bidding of the Board School boy and the bicycle boy—and remaineth with us even unto this day.

Clearly, the halfpenny paper could only afford half the space to what is known as "original matter" that was accorded by its penny rival. Parliamentary and law

reports were made taboo. The "snippet" habit was inoculated on to the vile body of the daily Press from virus obtained from the "Bits" papers. And so eager was the bicycle boy to swallow his tabloided doses of news that he never discovered the inroads gradually made by the advertiser on the spaces originally devoted to reading matter. Nay, so contented was he with the latest method of presenting the news of the day, that he did not even mind when further encroachments were made on his news columns, and a daily portion of the broadsheet was filched for the presentation of a solid chunk of fifth-rate fiction. In his present temper the bicycle boy appears ready to stand almost *anything*!

Meanwhile, and in face of this determined and successful competition on the part of the halfpenny papers, what has been the policy of the penny news-sheets? They have gone on enlarging their borders, increasing their bulk, and adding to their weight—adding to their weight, I mean, in the literal, and not in the figurative, acceptance of that phrase. The Parliamentary and law reports are more formidable in their length and particularity than ever. Book-reviewing is carried on to an extent hitherto only demanded in a literary weekly; essays on engineering, gardening, motoring, fishing, have regular days devoted to them. The advertisers are no longer satisfied with a modicum of space. The mural poster has been transferred to the pages of the penny morning paper. Oxbridge's full pages have become an expected item in the day's entertainment, and Coco's illustrations of his physical perfections have become an integral feature of our daily portion. The result is that the penny paper has grown to an unwieldy bulk, awkward to handle, impossible to turn over in a train or in the open, and containing, in proportion to the small ha'pennyworth of what one does want, an intolerable deal of what one does not, and is never likely to, want.

The general conclusion to be deduced from these necessarily undemonstrable statements is that the fate of any given newspaper is in the hands of the advertisers. Editors choose to address themselves exclusively to their readers, and maintain a splendid official ignorance of the advertiser.

This is the only *pose* possible to the well-regulated editor. Did he for a moment admit, even to himself, that his professional emoluments were derived from Oxbridge and the British and foreign tradesman generally, he would no longer be able to take the Press quite so seriously as he does ; indeed, he would scarcely be able any longer to take himself quite seriously, and that would surely be a great pity.

Suppose for a moment that some other channel were discovered—we live in an age of surprising discoveries—which the advertisers regarded as more suited to their requirements than the present system. What happens ? The small advertiser, whose three-and-sixpences form the real backbone of every newspaper enterprise, follows the big one. The papers shrivel up in dimensions, and down comes the price, or, in the alternative, up go the shutters. I am glad to reflect that the owners of newspapers have made such fortunes out of their enterprise that they can calmly face the future.

I have shown how the pressure of advertisers has affected the penny papers. It has induced them to increase their space and the quantity of their "reading matter." On the chief of the halfpenny morning papers the pressure has had an entirely different effect. The astute proprietor has met increased pressure by an increased tariff. The advertiser's scale on the principal halfpenny paper is, I believe, higher than that of the *Times*. Even at this prohibitive rate the public presses on with a demand for publicity for its wants. This impinging on the domain of the mere reader is skilfully masked. Always the advertiser is asking for, and obtaining, more space. The tabloids of news are more scientifically compressed. Unconsidered trifles are snipped off the stodgy chunks of negligible fiction ; for the newspaper *feuilleton* is but a sickly growth in Fleet Street soil. The leading article is squeezed into a paragraph to admit the prospectus of a pill. Yet the paper is made to look the same as usual. There is never anything *décolleté* about its appearance, no matter how much it may have been stripped. But here also there is an appointed limit beyond which it will be impossible to step without incurring the suspicion

and arousing the resentment of the long-suffering reader. That limit, I apprehend, may at any time be touched.

At present the newspaper habit appears to be strong, inherent, and hereditary, in the British people. But is the habit really as deep as it is widespread? With men of the world the habit does not even now persist. The man of the world seldom *reads* a newspaper. He will take a copy up, and give a glance at stocks or at starting prices. In the smoking-room of his club he will use the daily broadsheet as a screen what time he is sleeping the sleep of the just-tired. Society will, however, always want to know what is "going on," and the end of the transition period of journalism upon which we have entered will be heralded by the introduction of a contrivance, original, scientific, and up-to-date, whereby the latest intelligence shall be distributed with increased certainty and celerity, and at a moderate cost.

The new contrivance, we may cheerfully assume, will make no use whatever of paper or printer's ink. Science will have exposed the insanitary effects of a continuous matutinal contact with these obsolete *media*, and the common-sense of the community will at last have discovered their curious inadaptability. The newspaper microbe will become as familiar a topic with the public as the lobster. Medical Officers of Health will "come down on" insanitary journals, even as in our own time they "come down on" defective drains. When the transition period shall have come to an end, and when the newspaper, as we know it, shall have come to an end, too, the disseminator of news will, it may reasonably be anticipated, appeal directly to the ear, and not to the eye, of the public. Nay, seeing that to science nothing is impossible, may we not be enabled to absorb our news without fatiguing either ear or eye? We may be taught to "take it in through the pores," like Joey Ladle.

The eventual solution of the difficulty will, doubtless, come to us from the element responsible for most of our modern miracles. An adaptation of wireless methods with the telephone seems to be indicated. The newspaper office of the future will be a vast exchange, an enormous central depot,

from which the news of the day will be transmitted to scattered subscribers. At these central establishments the news of the world will continually pour in. Skilled hands—the old sub-editorial hands—will winnow it, prune it, classify it, and, generally speaking, make it ready for the million receivers of the subscribers. Happily, the new order will involve little or no abrogation of the functions of the journalist. The editor, of course, is doomed, for the public will pay for news, and not for notions. But even under the journalistic order as we know it the power of the editor has become more and more circumscribed. He has been going for a long time ; soon he will have gone. But the position of the staff should be enhanced. The journalist, who must reappear under some other title, will be brought more under the personal control of the subscriber. Errors in collection or transmission will, as in other departments, be traced to their source. The members of a staff will no longer find shelter behind the impenetrable anonymity of an editor. They will have less kudos, but they will have better pay. They will have become the servants of a sound commercial undertaking, and they will have ceased to talk of themselves as “ the Fourth Estate of the Realm.”

The processes of evolution are very gradual, and go unrecorded. How long will this one take ? A century ? Half a century ? Shall we tie ourselves to a date, and fix upon the year 1960 as the time of the great consummation ?

Let us imagine the passage of the intervening years, and seek out Jones in the suburbs, the suburbs in 1960 meaning an area of twenty-five miles from the City. Jones descends with all his accustomed pomposity to the wife and olive-branches assembled in the breakfast-room. He acknowledges the salutes of the family with that semiregal affability which is one of his most engaging characteristics. He looks through the window, and notes with satisfaction that his aeroplane is moored to the aero-railings—shall I say ? Then he seats himself at the breakfast-table, and places the “ receiver and communicator ” in position at his side, or, rather, at the side of his plate.

This insignificant implement is of silver or of gold or of

inferior metal, according to the means or tastes of the subscriber. It is the "last word"—as far, at least, as 1960 has gone. It sucks in from the ambient air the news sent circulating from the central depot, and by a most ingenious contrivance it will record only such news as is demanded of it. This selection is regulated by a curious arrangement of "stops." There is the "City" stop, the "Parliamentary" stop, the "Courts" stop, the "Racing" stop. Jones, you may depend, turns the "City" tap on before any other. In answer to his inquiry as to the prices of certain stocks, he obtains an immediate answer. He next inquires as to the result of last night's debate in the House of Commons. He does not seek after sporting intelligence at the breakfast-table—bad example to the boys, he considers it. Thus the news is gently murmured to Jones as he eats his ham and eggs; for, in spite of the advance of science, the middle-class breakfast-table of 1960 is the middle-class breakfast-table of the early Victorian era. Jones digests his mental pabulum as he masticates his food.

Jones rises from his place, hastens out to his aeroplane, and is soon purring along to Tom Tiddler's Ground. Being a considerate paterfamilias, he leaves the "receiver" at home for the use of the family. His unselfishness in this respect may be discounted by a consideration of the fact that he has another "receiver" at his office in the City. The family gathers in turn round the little implement—scarcely bigger than a Jew's-harp it is—and apply to the vibrating atmosphere, now charged with intelligence hot from a thousand sources, for items suited to the domestic hearth. The boys have, I will suppose, had a first "cut in," clamorous about starting prices or cricket. But the interests of the ladies are more various and more widespread. They would know, for instance, who is married and who dead? What is going on at the theatres, and what at the Court? How is Society conducting itself? There is no scandal about Queen Elizabeth, one may piously hope? How shapes the gossip of the day, and is there an announcement of any Great Pink Sales?

In ten minutes they have learned all that the heart of

woman can desire to know, and they have satisfied their legitimate thirst for knowledge without having had to prosecute a weary search through the unwieldy pages of a bulky newspaper. I can imagine the fond mother of 1960 fetching a sigh as she recalls the sad, bad system which was in vogue in the days of her innocent childhood. She shudders at the memory of the blurred, insanitary broad-sheets of an earlier time.

And the cost ? . . . I do not suppose that it will exceed the amount of the subscription at present paid for the daily delivery of a penny paper. It would probably "pan out" at something less. The cost of a penny paper totals up to something like five-and-twenty shillings a year. For an annual subscription of a guinea the little implement will probably be placed at the disposal of its customers by the great central exchange. . . . So mote it be !

INDEX

- AARONSON, JO**, 251
 "Actea: the Nymph of the Shore," 23
Adam Architecture, 158
Adelphi Theatre, 93, 124, 218, 247, 284
Advertisements, 296
Ailesbury, Marquis, 250, 283
Ainsworth, Thomas, 35, 47
 —, **William Harrison**, 33
 "Aladdin" (burlesque), 230
Albery, James, 154, 216
Albion Tavern, 28, 29, 245
Alhambra, The, 232-238
Alias (costumier), 220
Alison, William, 81, 200
All the Year Round, 206, 248
Ally Sloper, 247
Amberley, Viscount, 175
 "Ambidextrous Man," Reade's articles in *Daily Telegraph*, 281
American Civil War, Sala's lectures, 55
Ames, Hugo, 203
 —, **Captain "Ossy,"** 203
Amusements, Sunday: *see* Sunday
Anderson, Andy, 268
 —, **David**, 18
 —, **Tom**, 282
Anderton's Hotel, 181
Angle, Jack, 282
Anglo-Saxon, The, 203
Ansdell, James, 181
 "Ape" (cartoonist), 70, 166, 250
Aquarium, The, 149
Archer, Fred, 267
 —, **William**, 93, 203
Ardilaun, Lord, 176
Arditi, 249
Arnold, Sir Edwin, 54
 —, **Matthew**, 54, 291
Artists, and the Press, 15
Arundel Club, 58
 "As in a Looking-Glass," 97
Ascot, 260
Athenæum, 35, 90, 280
Austin, Alfred, 182
Avenue Theatre, 90
 "Babil and Bijou," 212
Bachelor (gaol chaplain, Tasmania), 254-259
Bagster (Bible publisher), 288
Baird, Abingdon, 250
Ballantine, Serjeant, 97
Ballet, 144, 234
Bancrofts, 24, 93, 156, 218, 222
Barber (in Temple Bar), 59
Barn Club, 114
Barnard, Richard, 135
Barnato, Barney, 119
Barnet, Dr., 32
 "Baron Nicholson" ("Judge and Jury" President), 239
Barrett, Oscar, 158
 —, **Wilson**, 277
Barristers, and journalism, 49
Barry, Helen, 213
 —, **Shiel**, 137
Bat, The, 95, 108, 111, 194
Baum, John, 234
Bayliss, "Bill," 221
Beaconsfield, Lord, "Ape's" cartoon, 166
Beaufort, Duke of, 214
Beck (landlord of Unity Club), 215
Becker, Bernard, 73, 169
Bedford, Duke of, 22
Bedford Hotel, Covent Garden, 246
Belasco, 162
Belfast, Charles Williams contests, 148
 "Bells, The," 103, 216
 "Bells go ringing for Sarah," 237
Bell's Life, 122
Bellwood, Bessie, 228, 250, 270
 "Ben My Chree," 277
Bend Or (race-horse), 267
Bendall, Ernest, 94, 102, 203
Benjamin, Alfred, 287
Benzon, Ernest, 284

- Beresford, Lord Marcus, 160
 Bernal, Ralph, 175
 "Bet Belmanor," 138
 Betting: Government's attitude, 268;
Hornet saved by, 203; "Jubilee
 Juggins," 284
 "Bible in Spain, The," 42
 Bicycle, effect on Sunday observance, 107
 Biggar, Joseph, 170
 Bignell, Bob, 223
 Bingham-Cox, William Henry, 122
Bird o' Freedom, The, 196
 Black and White artists, 15
 "Black Crook, The," 237
 Blackburn, Judge, 53
 Blackmore, R. D., 246, 290
 Blackpool, 219
 Blanton, Charles, 266
 "Bleak House," 75, 158
 Blue Posts (Cork Street), 47, 283
 Board of Works, 240
 "Bob Acres," 210
 "Bobbos": see Williams, Robert
 Bohemian clubs: see Clubs
 "Book of the Dog, The," 289
 Bookmakers, 260-275
 Booth, General, Huxley's opinion of, 115
 "Boris": see Bromhead, Harry
 Borrow, George, 42-46
 Boswell, 55, 64
 Boucicault, Dion, 213, 219
 Boulanger, General, 252
 Bowen, Lord Justice, 177
 Bowles, T. Gibson, 68, 70, 97, 193
 Bowling-alley, American, 282
 Boxing, 281
 Boyd, Dr. A. K. H., 115
 —, Frank, 114, 196
 Boyes, Vincent, 147
 Boyle, Sir Courtney, 282
 Braddon, Miss, quoted, 179
 Bradford, Lord, 266
 Bradlaugh, Charles, 77
 Brereton, Austin, 103
 Brett, Tommy, 288
 Brewer, Charles, 266
 Briant, Barney, 63
 Bromhead, Harry, 268
 Bromley, Val, 173
 Brooks, Reginald Shirley, 64, 109
 Brough, Lionel, 158-160, 212-214
 Brougham, Lord, 151
 Broughton, F. C., 202
 Brown, Madox, 36, 244
 —, Oliver Madox, 36
 —, Tom (waiter at Cheshire
 Cheese), 65
 "Brown Study, A" (notorious
 cartoon), 199
 Browne, Harold (Bishop of Win-
 chester), 113
 —, Lennox, 100
 Bruce, Edgar, 172
 Brunton, William, 31, 62, 220
 Bryan, Alfred, 202
 Buchanan, Robert, 124, 261-262, 280
 Buckstone, J. B., 30
 "Bulgarian Atrocities," Gladstone
 and, 185
 Bulls, Parliamentary, 177
 Burdett-Coutts, Baroness, 100
 Burleigh, Bennet, 58
 Burlesque, 86, 208
 Burnand, F. C., 102
 Burnham, Lord, 54, 93
 Burton, Bloundelle, 290
 Bury, Viscount, 151
 Butler, Richard, 271
 Byron, Henry J., 130-133, 199, 202,
 209, 281
 —, Lord, 37, 132, 288
 Café l'Étoile, 243
 — Royal, 241, 247, 251; Romano
 at, 250
 — Verrey: see Verrey's
 Caine, Hall, 46, 277
 Cairns, Sir Hugh McCalmont, 148
 Camden Town, Paravicini's Theatre,
 238
 Campbell, Herbert, 228
 Canteen, in music-halls, 236
 Canterbury Music-Hall, 144, 232
 Carlyle, Thomas, 89, 90; on Dr.
 Boyd (quoted), 108; Shiel Barry
 and, 219
 "Carols of Cockayne, The," 153
 Carr's Restaurant, 248
 Carte, D'Oyly, 221, 287
 Cartoons, *Vanity Fair*, 69
 Cassell and Co., *The Echo*, 197
 Castro: see Orton, Arthur
 Catling, Thomas, 102
 "Cavalleria Rusticana," 249
 Cave, Joseph, 238
 Chair of Journalism, 18
 Chairman: see Music-Halls
 Chalice, Edith, 173
 "Champagne Charlie is my Name,"
 225
 Chandor, John, 196
Chantecler, 193
 Chappel, "Cis," 287
 "Charles I.," at Lyceum, 244
 Charlotte Street, Bohemian restaur-
 ants, 244

- Chertsey, 288
 Cheshire Cheese, The, 62-66, 166
 Chevalier, Albert, 225-231; song
 quoted, 275
 "Chicken and Champagne," Irving's
 first-night receptions, 88
 "Chilperic," 96
 Chinery, 150
 Chop-houses, 246
Christian World, referred to, 78
 Church and Sunday amusements,
 108, 111-115
 Circus, at Covent Garden, 219
 Clarke, Sir Edward, 101
 —, Hamilton, 100, 158
 —, John (Adelphi), 218
 —, John Sleeper, 210-212
 Clarke's Ferry, 287
 Claude, Angelina, 210
 "Cloches de Corneville, Les," 137
 "Cloister and the Hearth, The," 280
 Clubs, Bohemian, 146 *et seq.*
 "Clytie," 201
 Coborn, Charles, 228
 "Cock" Tavern, Fleet Street, 60
 "Cock-and-Hen" Clubs, 149
 Cockburn, Sir Alexander, 179
 "Cocky": *see* "Flying Baker,
 The"
 Coffins, Wickerwork, Godfrey Tur-
 ner's exhibition, 56
 Cohen, Sam, 162
 Colborne, John, 149
 Cole, Comyns, 271
 Coleman, "Fatty," 149
 —, John, 212
 Colenso, Bishop, 200
 Collette, Charles, 142, 158
 Collins, Churton, 18, 19
 "Colonel Lighthouse": *see* White-
 head, Colonel
Comic News, 199
 Coney, Jack, 228
 Conjurers, street, 119
 Conservatives, T. Gibson Bowles
 attacks, 69
 "Conversion of Colonel Quagg,
 The," 55
 Conway, Harry B., 288
 Cook, Basil, 112
 —, Dutton, 73, 101
 Coombe End, Dr. Gordon Hake at,
 42
 Cooper (Twickenham ferryman), 291
 Cooper (Brothers) of the Albion
 Tavern, 28
 Cordery, George, 171
 Corlett, John, 62, 109-110, 270
Cornhill, The, 55, 206
 "Coster's Serenade, The," 231;
 quoted, 275
 "Cosy Club," 83
 Covent Garden Opera House, 212-213
 Coventry Club, 159
 Cowell, Peter, 165
 Cowley (poet), 291
 Crauford, Sterling, 263
 Cremorne Gardens, 235
 Crime, newspaper portrait leads to
 arrest, 15; specialist on news-
 paper, 12
 Crimean War, Captain Hamber and
 the German Legion, 198
 Criterion Theatre, 286
 Cromer, Clement Scott's articles, 57
 Cruikshank, George, jun., 187
 "Crutch and Toothpick Brigade,"
 208
Cuckoo, The, 95, 193
Daily News referred to, 14, 78;
 George Hodder, 220; John Hol-
 lingshead, 207; H. H. S. Pearce,
 148; Moy Thomas, 91
Daily Telegraph, 58; "Ben My
 Chree" critique, 277; on book-
 makers, 264; dramatic criticism,
 93; first newspaper illustration,
 15; Labouchere attacks, 76; obitu-
 ary of Brigadier-General McIver,
 185; Charles Reade, 281; Sala, 54;
 Clement Scott, 50; Godfrey Tur-
 ner, 56; Robert Williams, 51-53
 Dallas, E. S., 241
 D'Anka, Cornelia, 237
 Danks, printer of the *Hornet*, 202
 Dartmoor, chaplain, 257
 Darwin, Charles, 157
 Davis, James, 95, 193; the *Bat's*
 articles on Sunday amusements,
 108, 111
 Davis, Mrs., 194
 Davitt, Michael, 253
 Day, John, 97
 "De Boots," J. S. Clarke in, 210-211
 De Groof (aeronaut), 235-236
 De Leuville, Marquis, 139-143
 De Windt, Harry, 142
 Dead-Heads, Irving's attitude, 102
 "Dead - Heads: Cornelius Nepos
 O'Mulligan," 85
 Delane, John, 294
 Denman Street, Pelican Club, 109-
 110
 Derby, The, "Sir Hugo," 266;
 "Robert the Devil," 267
 "Descent of Man, The," referred to
 157

- Devonshire Club, 150
 Diary, importance of, to journalists, 94
 "Diary of a Disappointed Politician, The," 193
 Dickens, Charles, 248; George Dolby as agent, 40; John Hollingshead and, 206; Tellson's Bank original, 61; Robert Williams and works of, 51
 Dickens-land, 59
 Didcot, Mr.: *see* Maurice, Hubert Jay
 "Digby Grand," Irving as, 103, 216
 Dilke, Sir Charles, 288
 "Diners-Out," 176
 "Dirty Jack": *see* Colborne, Hon. John
Dispatch, The, 123
 Disraeli, *Vanity Fair* cartoon, 70
 Dixon, Hepworth, 49
 —, "Willie," 49
 —, Willmott, 71, 123
 Dolby, George, 40
 "Don Juan" referred to, 288
 "Doubtful Boyle": *see* Boyle, Sir Courtney
 Dove, Patrick Edward, 249
 Dowse, Baron, 177
 Dowty ("O. P. Q. Philander Smiff"), 203
 "Dr. Pangloss," 210
 Dramatic criticism, 84 *et seq.*; longevity and, 90; Robertson comedies, 30
 Drayton (poet), 291
 Drummond (waiter at Eccentric Club), 160
 —, Archie, 110
 —, Hughie, 110, 250
 Drury Lane, 89
 — Theatre: *see* Theatre Royal, Drury Lane
 Duck, William, 130
 Dufferin, Marquis of, 151
 Duguid, Professor, 186
 Dunn, Dick, 129, 263
 Dunning, Tom, 148
 Dunphy, Charles, 101
 Durham, Lord, 194
 "Durham Ox, The": *see* Mundell, Steve
Dwarf, The, 204
 Eccentric characters of Fleet Street, 116 *et seq.*
 Eccentric Club, 159
Echo, The, 75, 197
 "Echoes of the Week," 55
 Edouin, Willie, 230
 Education, Universities and journalism, 19
 Edwardes, George, 293
 Edwards, George Spencer, 271
 —, Passmore, 197
 Egham Hythe, 289
 "Egoes of the Week" skit, 55
 Electric Light, in theatres, 206
 Empire Club, 151
 — Music-Hall, 232
 English Literature, Chair at Washington University, 39
 "English Rose, The," 124
 Esterhazy, 253
 Etty (painter), referred to, 22
 Evans, Arthur, 72
 —, Morgan, 186-187
 Evans's Hotel, 153, 216, 282
Evening Standard, 168
Examiner, The, 50
 Fairlie, Mr., 96, 97
 "Fairlie v. Blenkinsop," 96, 97
 Falstaff Club, 153
 Farnie, H. B., 217, 210
 Farquhar, George, 25
 Farren, Nellie, 208-209, 287
 Fawn, James, 228
 Featherstonhaugh, 202
 Fenians, at Cowell's public-house, Holborn, 165
 Fernandez, James, 217
 Fetter Lane, "The Flying Baker," 128-129
 "Feuilleton": *see* Serial Stories
Field, The, 157, 186, 271
Figaro: see London *Figaro*
 First Nights, 88, 98-103
 Fiske, Stephen, 201
 Fitzgerald, Edward, 278
 —, Percy, 101
 Fitzwilliam, "Billy," 110, 250
 Fleet Street, changes in, 59; contrasts, 9
 "Floradora," 195
 "Flying Baker, The," 128-129
 Foli, Signor, 158
 Forbes, Archibald, 14, 19
 Foreign Office, Labouchere's dispute with, 76
 Foster, runs club in Long Acre, 163
 "Fourth Estate," 298
 Fowles, Miss, 213
 Fox, chairman of Middlesex Music-Hall, 224
 "Fra Giacomo," 262
 Fraser, Fred, 264
 Freaks, 121

- "Frederick the Great" (Carlyle) quoted, 108
 "Free-and-Easies": *see* Music-Halls
 Free Lance, Americans as, 38
 Freeman (landlord of Magpie Hotel), 287
 French, Sydney, 122
 Frost (painter), 22
 Fry, Oliver, 72
 Fryer, Captain, 234
Fun, 31, 62
 Furness, H., 170
 Furniss, Harry, 74, 170
 Furtado, Miss, 218
 Gaiety Bar (Strand), 220
 Gaiety Theatre, 137, 205 *et seq.*:
 burlesque at, 86; burlesque by Sala, 55; cloak-room subletting abolished, 206; John Maclean, 171; matinee instituted, 208; House of Molière at, 208; programme fee abolished, 206; Valerie Reece, 59
 Gaiety Theatre, Dublin, 177
 "Gallery of Family Portraits," Front Bench described, 69
 Gallon (jockey), 263
 Garibaldi's doctor, 250
 "Garden of Sleep, The," 57
 Garrick Club, 218
 "Gaspard the Miser," E. J. Odell as, 137
 Gatti's Restaurant, 247
 Gay, Drew, 58
 Geary, Alfred, 161
 "Genevieve de Brabant," 266
 "Genteel Pencillers in Velvet," *Daily Telegraph's* phrase, 264
 George, David Lloyd, 247
 —, Edward, 132
 German Legion, Captain Hamber and, 198
 Gerrard Street, Soho, "Barn Club" premises, 114
 Gibbs, Philip, 9, 12, 14, 71
 Giffard, Dr., 294
 —, Hardinge: *see* Halsbury, Lord
 Gilbert, Sir W. S., 156
 Gilbey (Sam Lewis's clerk), 284
 Gilchrist, Connie, 214
 "Giniral, The": *see* O'Shea, John Augustus
 Giovanelli, Edward, 134
 Gipsies, George Borrow and, 44
 Girling, Mrs., 273
 Gladstone, Herbert, 148
 —, William Ewart, 121, 167, 185
 Globe Theatre, 180
 Glover, James M., 195
 Glyn, Lewis, 178
 "God and the Man," 262
 Goldberg, "Willie," 109-110
 "Golden Butterfly" (houseboat), 289
 Goldsmith, Oliver, reference, 20, 25
Good Words, 206
 Goodall, Bella, 234
 Goodwood, 260
 Gosling's Bank, 61
 Gottheimer: *see* Grant, Baron
 Grant, Baron, 197, 233
 "Grant's Folly" (Kensington), 233
Graphic, The, 91
 Great Eastern Railway, Clement Scott's poems, 57
 Green, Baker, 156
 —, Paddy, 155
 Green-Room Club, 159
 Greenwich dinners, 193
 Greenwood, James, 260
 Grossmith, George, 158
 Gunn, John, 177
 Hake, George (junior), 46
 —, Dr. Gordon, 41-42
 Hall, "Nobby," 281
 —, Owen: *see* Davis, James
 Halliday, Andrew, 154, 215
 Halsbury, Lord, 150
 Hamber, Captain, 14, 197
 "Hamlet," 237
 Hampton, D'Oyly Carte's house, 287; race-meeting, 272
 Hannay, James, 279
 Hanover Square rooms, 40
 Hanson, Sir Reginald, 238
 Harcourt, Charles (actor), 215
 Hardy, Lady Duffus, 36
 "Harmonic Clubs": *see* Music-Halls
 Harmsworths, purchase *Vanity Fair*, 72
 Harris, Sir Augustus, 89, 174
 —, Captain, 205
 Hassard, Sir John, 112
 Hatchment Painter, 20-21
 Hatton, Joseph, 101, 201
Hawk, The, 195, 204
 Hawthorne, Grace, 276
 Haymarket, night-houses, 161
 — Theatre, 30, 211
 Head, Charles, 265
 Healy, Father (of Bray), 176
 Heatley, Tod, 151
 Henty, George, 14
 Heraldry, 31: *see also* Hatchment Painter
 Herman, Henry, 96, 221
 Hervé, F. R., 96
 Hewitt, Agnes, 115

- Hicks Pasha, 167
 Higginson, Rev. Peter, 200
 Hill, Jenny, 228
 Hoare's Bank, 61
 Hoaxes, 164-180
 Hodder, George, 220
 Hogarth, 55
 Holborn, Fenian meeting-house, 165
 — Restaurant, 233
 — Viaduct, 240
 Holland, William, 87, 219, 238
 Hollingshead, John, 137, 205-208, 229, 238
 Holloway, Thomas, 281
 Holt, Clarence, 218
 Holywell Street, 215
 "Home for Lost Dogs": see Wanderers Club
 Honey, George, 154, 158, 216
 Hood, Tom, 31, 62
 Hook, Theo, 288
 Horace, James Hannay's dinners, 279
 Horn, Brothers, 110
Hornet, The, 201-203
 "Hotel Cecil" (Salisbury administration called), 69
 Houghton, Arthur Boyd, 154
Hour, The, 197
 "House of Molière" at Gaiety Theatre, 208
 House-boats, 289
Household Words, 206
 "How I lost £250,000 in Two Years," 285
 Howe (*Morning Advertiser*), 101
 —, Henry (actor), 101
 Hudson, William, 290
 Hueffer, Ford Madox, 36
 Hummums, The, 246
 Humphreys (*Morning Post*), 56
 Hurst, Joseph, 99
 Hurstpierpoint, Ainsworth at, 34
 Huxley, opinion of General Booth, 115

Illustrated London News, The, 55
 Illustrations, in newspapers, 15
 Inns: see Restaurants and Taverns
 Irving, Sir Henry, 88, 98-103; in "Charles I.," 244; first-night receptions, 88; and G. R. Sims, 95; in "Two Roses," 216; Oscar Wilde's views of, 16
 "Island of Tranquil Delights, The," 39
 Ives, Chester, 199, 251

 Jacobi, 234
 James, David, 215, 218
 Jamrach's, 274
 Jay, Mr.: see Maurice, Hubert Jay
 "Jehu Junior": see Bowles, T. Gibson
 Jenks (gambling-den promoter), 251
 Jeune, Sir Francis, 100
 "Jimmy's": see St. James's Restaurant
 "Jingoism," in music-hall songs, 227
 Johnson, Dr., 55, 64; quoted, 267
 Johnstone, Major "Bob" Hope, 110
 Jordan, Norrie, 180
 "Jubilee Juggins": see Benzon, Ernest
 "Judge and Jury, The," 239
 Judges, as wits, 177-179
 Junior Athenæum Club, 125
 — Carlton Club, 198
 — Garrick Club, 84, 158, 217, 234, 277

 Kahn's Museum, 235
 Kean, Edmund, 137
 Keating, Justice, 96
 Kelly, Charles, 246
 —, W. W., 276
 Kelmscott, 290
 Kenealy (junior) founds *Modern Society*, 61
 Kensington, "Grant's Folly," 233
 Kerr, Commissioner, 178
 Kettner's, 241
 Khartoum, Frank Power as British Consul, 167
 Kilmorey, Lord, 137
 Kilpack's American bowling-alley, 282
 King, Tom, 206
 King's Lynn, T. G. Bowles, M.P. for, 68
 Kingsbury, race meeting, 273
 Kingsley, Rev. Charles, 21
 Kitty (flower-seller), 120
 Knatchbull, Captain, 256
 Knight, Joseph ("Knight Owl"), 90-93, 100, 101
 Krehl, George, 253

 "La Fleche" (race-horse), 266
 Labouchere, Henry, 63, 73-79; Attache at Washington, 70; attacks *Daily Telegraph*, 76; crusade against impostors, 140; on G.O.M., 185; mission to St. Petersburg, 76; and Parnell forgeries, 190; quoted, 101; as member for Middlesex, 78; founds *Truth*, 70; "West-End Usurers" articles, 74; on *The World*, 73; rivalry with Yates, 79
 Lady, The, 72

- "Lady Tichborne," 180
 Lamb, Charles, quoted, 256
 "Lame Clarke": *see* Clarke, John (Adelphi)
 Langham, Nat, 45
 Lansdowne, Lord, 50
Lantern, The, 203
 "Last Days of Pompeii, The," 63
 Lauder, Harry, 225
 "Lavengro," 42
 Law Courts, at Westminster, 53
 Lawson, Edward: *see* Burnham, Lord
 Le Queux, William, 290
 Lee, Edgar: *see* Tasker, William
 Leech, John, 232
 Leeds, Charles Williams stands for, 148
 Lefroy, Percy, 115, 161
 Leicester Square, 83, 232-234
 Leigh, Henry S., 80, 153-154, 220
 Leno, Dan, 225, 228
 Lever, Charles, 241
 Levy, Jonas, 153
 —, Joseph Moses, 58
 Lewis, Sir George, 63, 74, 194; at Lyceum first night, 101; and Parnell, 190
 —, Louis, 63
 —, Sam, 283
 Leybourne, George, 225
Licensed Victuallers' Gazette, 122
 "Life of Irving" (Brereton), 103
 "Light of Asia, The," 54
 Liskeard, Bernal Osborne stands for, 175
 "Little Billee, The" (house-boat), 290
 Livingstone, David, 181
 Lloyd, Arthur, 226
 —, Marie, 286
Lock to Lock, 291
 Lockwood, Frank, 101
 Londesborough, Lord, 212
 London, Bohemian quarter, 244; changes, 116 *et seq.*, 240; Sunday in, 103
London Figaro, 93
 London Restaurant, Fleet Street, 62
 Longevity, dramatic criticism conducive to, 90
 Lonsdale, Lord, 73
 Loseby, Constance, 209
 Lotus Club, New York, 154
 Lovell, John, 14
 Lowe, Robert, 257
 Lucas, Seymour, 64
 Lucy, Sir H. W., 73, 80
 Ludgate Hill Station, Spiers and Pond's buffet, 62
 Lyceum Theatre, 88; "Charles I.," 244; "Chilperic," 96; dead-heads, 102; first nights, 98-103; "Le Petit Faust," 96
 Lyons, Sir Joseph, 293
 Lyric Theatre, 174
 Macaulay, Lord, 51
 "Macbeth," 103, 171
 MacDermott, Mr., 20
 "Macdermott, The Great," 227
 Macdonald, Patrick, 49, 152
 McIver, Brigadier-General, 183-185
 MacKay, Dr. Charles, 146
 —, Wallis, 174
 —, William, 92, 291
 Macklin, Charles, 208
 MacLean, John, 171, 209
 Macleod, Norman, 206
 MacMahon (inventor of tape-machine), 251
 "Madge" of *Truth*, 80
 Magee, Bishop, 70
 Magpie Hotel, 287
 Maiden Lane, Rule's, 159, 221; "The Spooferies," 162
 Maitland: *see* Mansell, Richard
 "Major Wellington De Boots," J. S. Clarke as, 210
Man of the World, 196
 Manchester, Duke of: *see* Mandeville, "Kim"
 Mandeville, "Kim," 110, 262
 Manning, Cardinal, 100
 Mansell, Richard, 96
 — Brothers, 220
 Marins, Claude D., 210
 Marshall, Frank, 101
 Marston, Westland, 36
 "Martlet" (steam-launch), 290
 Marzials, Theo., 36, 291
 Mashers, at Gaiety Theatre, 208
 Matinees, Hollingshead institutes, 208
 Matthews, Charles, 21, 208
 "Matthias," Irving as, 103, 216
 Maurice, Hubert Jay, 75
 —, Rev. F. D., 21
 May, Phil, 82-83, 160, 200
Mayfair, 80
 Merrit, Paul, 89
 Merry, Tom, 81, 200
 Meux, Lady, 59, 237
 —, Sir Henry, 59
 Middlesex, Labouchere as member for, 78
Middlesex Chronicle, The, 290
 Middlesex Music-Hall, 229
 Middleton, Captain, 126

- Millar, Joaquim, 37
 "Mogul, The": *see* Middlesex Music-Hall
 Money-lenders, 283
 Montague, Harry, 215
 Montrose, Caroline, Duchess of, 262
 Moore, Augustus, 195
 —, A. K., 187
 — (of Cheshire Cheese), 65
 — (Waterloo Club), 163
 Morgan, Matt, 199
 Morning, 198, 251
 Morning Advertiser, 101, 197
 Morning Herald, 294
 Morning Post, 56; criticism of "Ben My Chree," 277; T. G. Bowles and, 69; Baker Green edits, 156; dramatic critic at Lyceum, 101; A. K. Moore edits, 187
 Morris, Mowbray, 87
 —, William, 290
 Mortimer, James, 203
 Morton, Charles, 231, 266
 "Moses and Aaron sat on a Rock" (song), 227
 Motor-Car, effect on Sunday observance, 108
 "Mr. Midshipman Easy" quoted, 92
 Mundell, Steve, 264
 Murphy, John, 85-87
 Murray, David Christie, 73, 80-81, 152, 271
 —, Earn, 161
 —, Grenville, 73
 Music-Halls, 222-239: *see also* Theatres
 "My Awful Dad," 208
 Nagle, Archibald, 234
 National Sporting Club, 153, 281
 Nesbit, G. F., 94, 271
 New York Herald, 92, 250
 "Newcomes, The," referred to, 244
 "Newman Noggs": *see* "Flying Baker"
 Newry, Lord: *see* Kilmorey, Lord
 Newspapers and magazines: derelicts of the Press, 79; extinct, 192-204; halfpenny, 294; for prisoners, 258; river, 291; sporting, 271: *see also* Press
 Newton, H. Chance, 102, 271
 Noguki (Japanese poet), 39
 North, Colonel, 289
 North Woolwich Gardens, 219
 Northampton, Labouchere stands for, 77
 "Notes on Aristotle" 50
 O'Brien, Sir Patrick, 175
 O'Connor, T. P., 123
 Odell, E. J., 137
 O'Donoghue: *see* Dunn, Dick
 O'Donovan, Edmund, 14, 164
 "Oh! Why did she Leave her Jeremiah?" (song), 225
 "Oh! Will you be my Saturday-to-Monday?" (song), 286
 O'Hagan, Mr., 287
 "Old Solomon" (tipster), 161
 Oliver: *see* De Leuville, Marquis
 Olney (bookie), 264
 Olympic Theatre, 276
 Omar Khayyam, 278
 Once a Week, 33
 Orton, Arthur, 179
 Osborne, Bernal, 175
 —, Lady, 175
 O'Shea, John A., 14, 62, 167, 202
 "Othello," 103
 Otto (waiter at Romano's), 136
 "Our 'Armonic Club," 230
 "Our Boys," 130, 209
 Owl, The, 193
 Oxenford, John, 84-87
 Oxford Music-Hall, 223
 "Pagan Poems," 195
 Pagani's, 247, 248, 249
 Paget, Lord Alfred, 85-87
 Palace Theatre, 232
 Paleologue, 160
 Pall Mall Gazette, 20
 Palmer, Minnie, 276
 Panton Street, 247
 Paravicini, 237
 Paris Mutuels, 268-270
 Park Lane (Barney Barnato's house), 119
 — Theatre, Camden Town, 237
 Parnell, Charles Stewart, 190
 — Commission, 188-191
 "Partridge at the Play" (articles in *The Squire*), 187
 Pask, Arthur T., 127
 Paunceford (waiter at the Albion), 20
 Pavilion Music-Hall, 223; Chevalier's debut, 231
 Painters: *see* Artists
 Peabody, and *The Hornet*, 201
 Peach: *see* Steele and Peach
 Pearse, H. H. S., 14, 73, 148, 169, 186
 Pelican, The, 114, 196
 Pelican Club, 108-110, 114, 159
 Pellegrini (cartoonist), 60, 72, 248
 "Pendennis," 20
 Persia, Shah of, 237
 Peters, Mrs., 141

- "Petit Faust, Le," 96
 Pettitt, Henry, 87
 Phelps, Samuel, 208
 Philharmonic, Islington, 266
 Philips, F. C.: *see* Fairlie
Phoenix, The, 95, 195
 Photography, value in Press work, 19
 Piesse, George, 250
 Pigott, Richard, 188-191
 Pilotel (artist), 252
Pink Un: *see* *Sporting Times*
 Piracy: *see* Plagiarism
 Pitteri, Mademoiselle, 238
 Plagiarism, 30, 281
 "Poems and Parables," 41
 Poet Laureateship, 182
 Poker, tabooed in Clubs, 154
 Pol, M., 23
Police Gazette, 291
 Pond, Christopher, 62-63
 Pope Alexander, 291
 —, Dr. Joseph, 220
 —, Sam, 220
 "Poppyland," Clement Scott's articles, 57
 Porter, John: *see* "Flying Baker"
 Portland Club, taboos poker, 154
 Power, Frank, 166
 Powles, Mr. (barrister), 157
 "Practical John": *see* Hollingshead, John
 Practical joking, 164-180
 Press, the, 9; artists' attitude to, 15; stage and, 15, 84; transition, 292
 Price, Julian, 160
 Prince of Wales's Theatre, 23-24
 Princess's Theatre, 276-277
 Prisons, newspapers in, 258
 Prize-Ring: *see* Boxing
 Proctor, John, 199
 Programme-sellers: *see* Theatres
 Prosser's Restaurant, 48
 Prostitution, suppression of Hay-market night-houses, 161
 "Pseudonymuncle," 281
Punch, 232; Burnand, 102; Furniss, 74; Hannay, 280; Phil May, 83; A. K. Moore, 187; Sala, 55
 Puritan Sabbath: *see* Sunday
 Purkiss, William, 291
 Purnell, Tom, 14, 202, 280

 Quaritch, 278
Quarterly Review, 164, 280
 Queen's Theatre, 63
 Queensberry, Marquis of, 110

 Racing, 260-275
 — Press: *see* *Sporting Press*

 Radcliffe, John, 158
 Rainbow Tavern, 28, 245
 Raleigh Club, 160
 Ranelagh, Lord, 120
 Rankin, Montgomerie, 186
 —, Peter, 71
 Ratcliff Highway (Jamrach's), 274
 Rational Sunday: *see* Sunday
 Reade, Charles, 280
 "Recreations of a Country Parson, The," referred to, 115
 Reece, Valerie: *see* Meux, Lady
Referee, The, 62, 268-271
 Reform Club, 150
 Restaurants and taverns, 60-66, 240-259
 Richardson, Frank, referred to, 81, 265
 Richmond, Bloundelle Burton at, 290
 "Ripetelle" (dance), 97
 "Robert the Devil" (race-horse), 266
 Roberts, Arthur, 110, 160
 —, John, 284
 Robertson, Thomas W., 24, 28, 29; Bancroft management, 93, 222; on critics, 30
 Robinson, Phil, 58
 Roche, Sir Boyle referred to, 177
Rocket, The, 127
 Rockley's wine bar, 219-220
 Rogers, "Johnny," 276
 —, Samuel, 171
 Romano's, 135-136, 247, 250
 "Romany Rice, The," 42
 Rosebery, Lord, 50
 Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, 46, 290
 Rossiter (jockey), 267
 Royal Academy (Trafalgar Square), 23
 "Royal Divorce, A," 276
 "Royal Dustbin": *see* Prince of Wales's Theatre
 Royalty Theatre, 174
 Royce, Edward W., 209
 "Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyám," 278
 Rule's, Maiden Lane, 159, 221
 Russell, Captain Fred, 110, 287
 —, Henry, 146
 Russell's club for ladies, 144-149
 Ryder, John, 62, 212

 St. Albans, Bingham-Cox's brewery, 126
 St. Georgi, 242
 St. James's Restaurant, 236
 — Theatre, 96
 St. Petersburg, Labouchere's mission to, 76

- St. Stephen's Review*, 82, 200
 Sala, George Augustus, 14, 19, 54, 279; and "Bet Belmanor," 138; and "Cheshire Cheese," 64; and Parnell forgeries, 190; and Clement Scott, 57; on Sunday amusements, 113
 Salisbury, Lord, 182
 — Administration, 182
 Sampson, Henry, 62, 270
 Sandow, Eugene, 238
 Sandys, Fred, 253
 Sanger, "Lord" George, 167
 Santley, Kate, 237
 Sara (dancer), 238
 "Sartor Resartus" referred to, 290
 "Satire and Satirists," 280
Saturday, 54
 Savage Club, 49, 138, 151-159, 205, 218
 "Savage Club Papers, The," 152
 Savoy Hotel, 251
 Scasi, Miss, 237
 Schenk, General, 154
 "School," 23, 29
 School of Journalism, 18
 Scott, Clement, 57, 93, 101, 127, 195, 203
 Seaman, Julia, 237
 "Second Mrs. Tanqueray, The," 93
 Serial story (in newspapers), 296
 "Silver King, The," 96
 Shaftesbury Theatre, 249
 Shakers, 273
 Shakespeare, William, 130
 Shaw, Vera, 186, 202, 285, 289
 Shepperton, journalists at, 288, 291
 Sheridan, Richard Brinsley, 25, 30, 93-96
 Shine, John L., 289
 Simpson's, Strand, 245
 Sims, George R., 95, 124, 215, 271
 "Singleton Fontenoy," 280
 "Sir Hugo" (race-horse), 266
 "Sir Pertinax MacSycophant," 208
Sketch, 50
Sketch, The, 50
 Skinner, Hilary, 14
Smart Society, 204
 Smith, Madeline, 59
 Snelling, Alfred, 284
 Social Democratic Club, 58
 "Society," 29-30
 Society journalism, 68: *see also* Press
 Soho, 241
 Soldene, Emily, 266
 Sothorn, E. A., 154, 170
 Soutar, Robert, 137, 209
 "South Sea Idylls," 39
 "Spice of Life, The," 71
 Spenser (poet), 291
 Spiers and Pond, 62
 "Spirit of the Times" — *see* "Sports of the Times"
 "Spiritual Wives," 49
 "Spooferies, The," 162
 Sporting Press, 271
Sporting Times (Pink Un), 98, 109, 110, 196, 201
 "Spy," 72
 "Squire, The": *see* Baird, Abingdon
Squire, The, 186-187
 Stage, 15, 84-103, 205 *et seq.*: *see also* Theatres and Music-Halls
 Staines, actors at, 288
Standard, The, 62; Alfred Austin, 182; Captain Hamber, 197; O'Shea, 168; Arthur Pask, 128; Robert Williams, 51
 Stead, W. H., referred to, 17
 Steele: *see* "Flying Baker"
 — and Peach, 264
 Steinitz, Carl F. von, 246
 Stephens, Pottinger, 68, 72, 125, 288
 Straight, Sir Douglas, 98
 Strand Theatre, 133, 210, 215, 230, 276
 Strange, Frederick, 236
 Street characters, 116 *et seq.*
 — performers, 116 *et seq.*
 "Street of Adventure, The" (novel), 9
 Stretch, Mat, 187
Stock-keeper, The, 253
 Stoddard, Charles Warren, 38
 Stoker, Bram, 99, 102
 Stone's chop-house, 246
 Sullivan, Barry, 171
 Sunbury, Bohemian colony, 209, 287
 Sunday, observance of, 104-115
 — League, 107
Sunday Times, 32
 Supper Club, 162
 Surrey Gardens, 237
 — Theatre, 87, 219
 Sutton (owner of Alhambra), 234
 Swan, The (Ditton), 286
 Swanborough, Mrs., 133
 "Swears and Swells": *see* Wells, Ernest
 Swinburne, Algernon, 36, 278
 Tagg, Thomas, 289
 Taine referred to, 121
 "Tale of Two Cities, A," 61
 "Tandragee" (race-horse), 262
 Tanner, Dr., 58, 191
 — Lombard, 191
 Tasker, William, 81

- Tasmania, Bishop of, 254
 Tasmania, prisons, 254-259
 Taunton, Lord, 78
 Tavistock, the, 246
 Taylor, Henry, quoted, 254
 Teddington, R. D. Blackmore at, 290
 Tegetmeyer, W. B., 157
 "Tellson's Bank" (Fleet Street original), 61
 Temple Bar, 55, 59
 — Club, 147
 Tennyson, Alfred, 60, 253
 Terry, Edward, 209, 210
 —, Ellen, 246
 Thackeray, William Makepeace, 55, 206
 Thames (river), 107, 285-291
Thames, The, 291
 Thames Embankment, 240
 Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, 28
 —, Dublin, 171
 Theatres, 205; Bancroft's productions, 220; boy programme-sellers, 99; cloak-room, subletting, 206; electric light in, 206; first nights, 88, 98-103; "mashers," 208; matinees instituted, 208; programme fees abolished, 206: *see also* Music-Halls
 Theobald's Park, Temple Bar in, 59
 "Theodore Hookings" ("Whobodies"), 174
 "Thief Takers," 281
 Thomas, Moy, 91, 100, 207
 Thormanby: *see* Dixon, Willmott
 Thorne, Tom, 215, 218
Thunderer, The: *see* *Times, The*
 Tichborne Case, 61, 179
Times, The: "Ben My Chree" critique, 277; Comyns Cole, 271; Dallas, 241; Deland, 294; dramatic critics, 84-89; Nesbit, 94; Parnell forgeries, 189; H. P. Stephens, 72
 "Toodles," J. S. Clarke as, 210
 Toole, John L., 119, 170, 209, 214
Tomahawk, The, 199
 Tosti, Francesco P., 248
 "Tower of London, The," 33
 Travellers Club, 151
 Trocadero (music-hall), 223
Truth, 70; fraud campaign, 140; Labouchere, 75; "Madge," 80; rivalry with *World*, 79
 Turf, the, 260-275
 Turf Club, taboos poker, 154
 Turner, Godfrey, 14, 202; at Cheshire Cheese, 65; on *Telegraph*, 56; wicker-work coffin exhibition, 56
 Twain, Mark, 39
 "Twickenham Ferry," 36, 291
 Twiss Case, novel founded on, 201
 "Two Roses," 103, 154, 216
 "Under Fourteen Flags," 183-185
 United Arts Club, 161
 United States, adopt newspapers for prisons, 258
 Unity Club, 215
 University of Birmingham, proposed Chair of Journalism, 18
 Upper House of Convocation, debate on Sunday Observance, 111
 "Vampires of London, The," 149
 Van Laun, Henri, 121
 Vance, the Great, 226
Vanity Fair, 69-72, 93, 97
 Vaudeville Theatre, 215, 247
 Vaughan, Kate, 209
 Venables, Gilbert, 14, 168
 Verrey's Restaurant, 241, 247, 253, 258-259
 "Vert Vert," 96
 "Vholes, Mr.," referred to, 75
 Victoria, Queen, 178
 Vignas (tenor), 249
 Vine, Summers, 156
 Volodyvoski (race-horse), 237
 Voules, Horace, 75, 80
 Vyse, Mr., 282
 Waldegrave, Lady, 154
 Walkley, A. B., 89
 Walter, John, 100
 Wanderers Club, 151
 Wapshot Farm, 289
 Ward, Artemus, 273
 —, Leslie, 72
 Wardell: *see* Kelly, Charles
 Warner (of Welsh Harp), 273
 Warrington (author), 20
 Washington, Chair of English Literature at, 39; Labouchere at, 77
 Waterford, Bernal Osborne stands for, 175
 Waterhouse (bookmaker), 266
 Waterloo Bridge, 157
 — Club, 163
 Watson, Aaron, 152
 Watts-Dunton, 101
 —, Theodore, 35
 "Way of the World, The," 81
 "We Don't Want to Fight," 227
 Webber, Byron, 102
 Webster, Ben, 93
 Week-ends, 285
 Wells, Ernest, 109-110

- Welsh Harp, 273, 274
 West End Hotel, 243
 "West End Usurers," articles in
The World, 74
 West London Rowing Club, 281
 Westminster, Duke of, 267
 Weston's Music-Hall, 223
 Whalley, G. W., 179
 "What Cheer, 'Ria! Ria's on the
 Job!'" (song), 229
 White, Arnold, 271
 Whitehead, Colonel, 144
 Whitney, 237
 "Who-bodies" Club, 174
 Whyte-Melville, G. J., 200
 ———, Hon. Mrs., 200
 Wigwam Club, 158
 Wilde, Oscar, 16, 101
 ———, "Willie," 90-93
Will o' the Wisp, The, 199
 Williams, Arthur, 212, 229
 ———, Charles, 14, 62, 148
 ———, Hume, 100, 153
 ——— (the elder), 193
 ———, Montague, 52, 98
 ———, Robert, 14, 49-54, 75
 Williamson, J. C., 39
 Wills, William Gorman, 243, 276
 Wilton, Marie, 24, 266
 Wimbledon Common, gipsies, 44
 Winchester, Bishop of: *see* Browne,
 Harold
 Winterbotham, on the *Hornet*, 203
 "Wiry Sal": *see* Sara
 Wits, 164-180
 "Witty Kitty": *see* Kitty (flower-
 seller)
 Women and music-halls, 223
 Wood, Mrs. John, 201
 Working Men's College, 21
World, The, 70, 72, 79, 291
 Wright, Mary: *see* Sara (dancer)
 Wyndham, Sir Charles, 172, 286
 Yates, Edmund, 14, 70, 72, 169;
Cuckoo founded, 95, 193; at Gor-
 ing, 291; in Holloway Prison, 73;
 rivalry with Labouchere, 79; at
 Lyceum first night, 101; *World's*
 success, 80
 Yorick Club, 159
 Zoological Gardens, Sunday opening,
 105

THE END

